

Gendered Communication and Interpersonal Dynamics in Reality-Workplace Discourse: A Study of “The Apprentice”

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Abstract. *Workplace communication is a kind of interpersonal communication with peculiar features and complexities because communication manifests based on the individual idiosyncratic features such as gender, education, backgrounds and prior experiences. Also, the United Kingdom work environment attests to diversity and inclusivity at workplaces, which have implications for leadership style and effective communication. The paper attempts to highlight the use of gendered language in interpersonal communication with the objective of identifying gendered language in “The Apprentice”; analysing the identified language to portray interpersonal dynamics; and relating the implications of the gendered language to effective leadership at workplaces. By relying on Handford’s (2010) theory, the two transcribed discussions are analysed on the basis of male and female. The gender-related content is analysed and supported with a frequency description. It is concluded that gender influences speech patterns at workplaces differently, and leaders need to understand the role and influence of gender in speech patterns to be effective and successful.*

Keywords: *Gender, Communication, Leadership, Conversations, Language*

Received: November 10, 2025

Revised: May 21, 2026

Accepted: July 24, 2026

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is crucial at a workplace (Abalogu et al., 2024; Jelani & Nordin, 2019; Phillips, 2020). Language, communication and culture are intricately interwoven to produce different messages (Bonvillain, 2019). As a whole, workplace discourse covers a wide range of communicative situations, and may be considered as including those in which corporate communication takes place (Bargiela-Chiappini et al, 2013; Holmes & Marra, 2014).

In other words, business discourse happens within and between commercial organisations; workplace discourse occurs in all workplace situations, from factories to hospitals to the non-profit sector and everywhere in between (Vallas & Cummins, 2015; Zelter et al., 2025; Lindhout & Reniers, 2022; Lee & Wellinghoff, 2024). Communication in commercial organisations encompasses both inter and intra-company communication, making it difficult to draw a clear line between the two (Alfalla-Luque et al., 2013; Pavla et al., 2024; Mautner & Rainer, 2017).

There will be a continuous variety of conversations going on at a workplace, depending on the demographics of its participants. Depending on the topic of conversation, this could range from mundane office activities to light-hearted chit-chat amongst co-workers. Conversations in the workplace can take place in a variety of contexts, from conversations among co-workers to interactions in service settings or the healthcare industry to cross-border commercial communications (McGuire, 2007; Handford, et al., 2019).

These different types of settings can lead to a variety of occurrences that indicate whether or not the conversations taking place are formal or casual. The focus of this paper is on the front stage interactions of team members in the UK TV show “The Apprentice” as it contains an analysis of the interpersonal and gender languages used during their discussion by paying attention to the leadership style at play amongst the two groups.

Language is the medium via which an interlocutor sends and receives messages with others. Interlocutors have an ineluctable impact on communication since it is possible for it to exist between persons (Roy et al., 2020; Darwin, 2017; Semsadi, 2020). Specifically, organisation cultures and leaders’ characteristics manifest in interpersonal communication (Brown et al., 2019; Frunză, 2017; Crossan et al., 2017) As a result, it is critical to focus on the syntax and semantics of language in both spoken and written contexts.

Indeed, the interaction of language and how people act via language are at the heart of interpersonal meanings, while organisational cultures are dependent on the effectiveness of interpersonal communication (Khan et al., 2025; Tao et al., 2024; Humaidan e al., 2026). Regardless of whether a text is spoken or written, the interlocutor hopes to convey information to their audience/readers through the medium of language. This indicates that each text has a link between the information suppliers and the information recipients (Mullany, 2013; Wichmann et al., 2020; Villena & Dhanorkar, 2020; Zhou et al., 2014; Reichelt et al., 2014).

This paper is motivated based on the fact that harmony, conducive for effective leadership, is achieved when there is less hesitation in interpersonal communication at workplace (Wahid, et. al., 2024). In addition, it has been evidently proven that language modulates interactions between women and men, this paper sheds light on how interpersonal and gendered language can be used at work, leveraging on the gendered speech patterns used in the workplace discourse of “The Apprentice”.

Theoretical Framework

In terms of interpersonal communication, the CANBEC (the Cambridge and Nottingham Business English Corpus) identifies four primary domains and presents a framework for analysing the language used in different genres of business communication (Handford, 2010). With the analysis of almost a million words of business meetings’ corpus to better understand how people communicate at work. Kulbayeva (2020) said that typically, stating one's position, hedging one's bets, and being polite, as well as making use of common knowledge, and demonstrating empathy and solidarity, are identified features of workplace discourse. There are also key interpersonal languages, which are regularly used terms for analysing interpersonal language. Deontic modality and pronouns are a just a few (Noorian & Biria, 2010; Sugianto, 2022)

This study is anchored on Handford (2010) theory of interpersonal communication. The theory is based on insights from previous theories and models including Systemic Functional Linguistics (Bateman, 2017; Zappavigna, 2011). As a socio-pragmatic theory, elements of pragmatics, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis reflect in Handford’s interpersonal communication theory.

Previous studies, including Holmes & Marra (2014), Afnan & Mohammad (2014) Wahid, et al. (2024), and Lexander & Thyness (2024) and have analysed workplace communication as a genre of interpersonal communication without applying Handford theory. The choice of this theory for this study is the recognition of institutional context and its potential for the analysis of workplace culture, leadership and teamwork. No wonder, Coffelt, et al. (2019) posits that workplace communication is determined by the type of “industry, occupation and organisation culture” (p.419).

The co-construction, relational and informational features of interactants’ communication strengthen the dynamism of institutional context such as a workplace. A nuanced understanding of other contexts, immediate and cultural contexts, aids in explaining work place discourse better. However, gendered language theories are entrenched in power inferiority in women’s discourse,

holding a dominance view as men portray power tendency. Handford theory does not only offer a clear view for analysing workplace interpersonal communication but questions the extent to which gender influences such workplace communication.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative content-analysis approach to examine gendered language and interpersonal dynamics in *The Apprentice*, a prominent United Kingdom reality-workplace television programme. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to interpret language as a socially constructed practice shaped by interactional and institutional contexts (Phillips, 2023). The analysis was conducted as an exploratory comparative case study; therefore, it focused on the communication displayed in the selected televised interactions rather than attempting to represent workplace communication among men and women generally.

The data consisted of transcripts from two selected group-discussion sessions in the programme: one involving a male group and the other involving a female group. The interactions were purposively selected because both sessions featured group members discussing and completing a workplace-related task, thereby providing comparable contexts for examining interpersonal and gendered communication. The male group comprised six speakers, while the female group comprised seven speakers. Thus, the study relied on a single media source but adopted a comparative perspective to identify similarities and differences between the language features displayed by the two groups. All speakers were anonymised and identified according to their speaking order rather than by their actual names.

The analytical framework was primarily based on Handford's (2010) account of interpersonal communication in workplace discourse, particularly the interpersonal features associated with the Cambridge and Nottingham Business English Corpus (CANBEC). The analysis focused on linguistic features such as pronoun use, hedging, backchannels, humour, expressions of solidarity and empathy, positive feedback, directness, and task-oriented statements. To examine gendered speech patterns, the utterances were also classified according to the masculine and feminine language indicators discussed by Holmes and Stubbe (2003). Masculine-coded features included aggressive, autonomous, competitive, confrontational, and direct language, whereas feminine-coded features included collaborative, facilitative, indirect, and supportive language. These classifications were treated as analytical categories rather than fixed characteristics inherently belonging to male or female speakers.

The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, each transcript was read closely to understand the interactional context and progression of the discussion. Second, each utterance was examined to identify interpersonal and gendered language features based on the analytical framework. Third, the identified expressions were assigned colour codes to make the categories visible in the transcript excerpts. Green, teal, sky blue, pink, blue, red, and yellow were used to distinguish the different communicative features. Fourth, the coded utterances from the male and female groups were compared to determine how particular language features functioned in negotiating solidarity, participation, authority, task completion, and group decision-making.

A descriptive frequency count was subsequently used to support the qualitative interpretation. Each occurrence of a masculine- or feminine-coded feature was recorded and grouped according to its relevant category. Because a single utterance could perform more than one interpersonal function, overlapping coding was permitted when supported by the context; for example, a backchannel could simultaneously function as a collaborative and supportive expression. The frequency counts were used only to describe patterns within the two selected interactions and were not subjected to inferential statistical testing. The final interpretation combined these descriptive frequencies with contextual analysis of the utterances to explain how gendered language contributed to the interpersonal and leadership dynamics displayed in each group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Male Group

Based on Handford's (2010) theory and the gender speech styles, the video clip transcript (Annotation) in Figures 1 and 2 below is used to examine how the men in the workplace interact with one another in terms of interpersonal and gender language.

Interpersonal Language

The question is asked at the beginning of the discussion, "What sets us apart from the women?" This statement is recognized as a collaborative statement, first of all to start up the discussion with the goal of differentiating themselves from the women. It is also a collaborative invitation to the rest of the group to make contributions (Rappaport, 2008).

The question is followed up with humour by the next speaker (indicated with the Teal colour), this served to reduce any form of tension and induce solidarity as everyone in the group found it funny. The humour could be recognized as a situational and teasing humour (Hay, 2000).

The green colour code in Figure 1 represent pronoun under the CANBEC corpus. "We" is a collaborative and feminine gender discourse. The inclusive pronoun shows a persistent focus on team collective responsibility and displays unity with the whole team. The pronoun indicates a clear illustration of collaborative leadership in a traditionally feminine way. "Let's try" is also a collaborative and feminine expression when used in this context. The speaker tries to make the team aware of the importance of the work at hand, which involves coming up with an inspiring and successful name for the group.

Figure 1: Male group

1. What sets us apart from the women?
2. "Our testicles" [All laugh]
3. [Speaker One] "Something strong... something solution ..."
4. [Speaker Two] "Something solutions ... something solutions ... I do like solutions"
5. [Speaker Three] "Yeah ... We're trying to be creative"
6. [Speaker One] "creativity .. innovation .. I think it could be along those lines"
7. [Speaker Four] "let's try to think of the word which is successful and aspirational"
[unknown speaker] "upbeat and snappy"
8. [Speaker Five] "what about a word like dynamite then?"
9. [Speaker Four] "no"
10. [Speaker 2] That is on the right wavelength though. The impact of the word is bang on
though [others: impact. ... impact] what. ... impact"
11. [Speaker Five] "The meaning of impact is its impact.. Its like ..."
12. [Speaker Six] "Can I suggest. ... I ... I ... I action it suggests something ... boom ... impact it's
something happening it's action"
13. [Speaker Two] "Votes for impact"
14. [Speaker Six] "I like impact by itself"
15. [Speaker Two] "Right... That's that, no more voting ... that's it ... done"
16. [unknown speaker] Just going back to our project manager
17. [speaker 2] you know what I don't mind...I'm happy to take responsibility first up. I'll step up
to the plate...yeah...everyone happy with that... [others: yeah] ...give me everything you can today
because at the moment we have to make sure we beat the opposition. If we win, we don't get
eliminated. We can do that as long as we work as a cohesive unit.

Key

Green: Collaborative

Teal: Humour

Sky blue: Hedge

Pink: Conditional: expressing stance

Blue: Backchannel: Solidarity

Red: Deontic Modality



Figure 1. Interpersonal Language

Conventional team-oriented leadership is shown by the focus on "we." Rather than portraying a leader as authoritarian, this emphasises the need of fostering a collaborative work environment that fosters innovation while maintaining the principles of an egalitarian leader and a consensus-building leadership style that are unique to the speech of women.

The phrase "I think" is a hedge. The speaker's aggressiveness and potential face-threats are reduced as a result of the speech. In this context, the phrase "I think" suggests a negotiation of power, and it is commonly employed in professional conversation. In addition, I believe it is feminine in character because it does not imply an attempt to pass a legally binding opinion on the subject. Instead, it makes a suggestion. In Figure 1, the pink coded words in the phrase "it may be along those lines" are conditional phrases that reflect a perspective on the subject. It is clear that the speaker is saying, "Well, it doesn't have to be these exact words, but it may be anything that is close to them." That is his stance on the timing for the deliberation, according to him. This observation is in tandem with Wahid, et al. (2024) submission that a workplace is an authoritarian environment and positive influencing skills such as effective communication is required to establish a good rapport.

According to Handford (2010), backchannels are a kind of communication between people. In a show of solidarity, they are used to interrupt a speaker with a brief answer. To demonstrate that they are paying attention to what the speaker has to say, and that they have no plans to take over the conversation, people make eye contact to convey that they agree with what they have just heard. Languages such as "yes" and "hmm" are among the brief verbal answers that listeners use to express agreement. Nonverbal backchannels are another option. During a single chat, they demonstrate two modes of communication. They are expressed in the video and ideated in the transcript with the blue colour code.

Based on the research of Handford (2010), expressing sympathy, support, and favourable appraisal of others is considered to be a kind of solidarity and empathy. It fosters teamwork by increasing motivation, involvement, and cooperation among members of the organisation. Good feedback signals, evaluative adjectives and idioms, colloquialisms and humour, as well as emotive phrases, are some of the most common languages used to express solidarity and empathy (Handford, 2010).

Gender Language for Male Group

Some common characteristics of masculine speech include "domination of talking time, forceful interruption, competitive and combative discourse," direct, independent, and task-oriented. However, it is common to find members of the male gender exhibiting traits of characteristics otherwise attributed to the female gender.

Direct and goal focused speech attributed to masculinity may be seen in the first sentence, "What distinguishes us from the women?" A speaker's intended words are used directly in a direct speech style. In order to make his message more acceptable to his audience, the speaker does not resort to "padding." Due to the forceful attitude of males, this form of communication is categorised as masculine language. Speech that is more focused on the task at hand is referred to as task-oriented (Merchant, 2012).

Figure 2: Male group

1. What sets us apart from the women?
2. "Our testicles" [All laugh]
3. [Speaker One] "Something strong... something solution ... "
4. [Speaker Two] "Something solutions ... something solutions ... I do like solutions"
5. [Speaker Three] "yeah .. We're trying to be creative"
6. [Speaker One] "creativity .. innovation .. I think it could be along those lines"
7. [Speaker Four] "let's try to think of the word which is successful and aspirational"
8. [unknown speaker] "upbeat and snappy"]
9. [Speaker Five] "what about a word like dynamite then?"
10. [Speaker Four] "no"
11. [Speaker 2] That is on the right wavelength though. The impact of the word is bang on though [others: impact. ... impact] what. ... impact"
12. [Speaker Five] "The meaning of impact is its impact.. Its like ... "
13. [Speaker Six] "Can I suggest. ... I ... I ... I action it suggests something ... boom ... impact it's something happening it's action"
14. [Speaker Two] "Votes for impact"
15. [Speaker Six] "I like impact by itself"
16. [Speaker Two] "Right.. That's that, no more voting ... that's it. .. done"
17. [unknown speaker] Just going back to our project manager
18. [speaker 2] you know what I don't mind...I'm happy to take responsibility first up. I'll step up to the plate...yeah...everyone happy with that... [others: yeah] ...give me everything you can today because at the moment we have to make sure we beat the opposition. If we win, we don't get eliminated. We can do that as long as we work as a cohesive unit.

Key

Yellow: Direct Masculine

Green: Vague

Red: Direct Masculine: aggressive



Figure 2. Gender Language

It is also ascribed to masculinity because of their task-oriented attitude and aptitude for problem solving. Male speaker with yellow colour code went directly to work without hesitation, as seen in Figure 2 (yellow-coloured speaker). He was focused only on the mission ahead of him and his team, and nothing else mattered to him. Though direct and task-oriented speech language are typically associated to masculinity in this type of speech, the inquiry itself looked meant as a way to distance him and the rest of his group from the feminine nature.

In response to the question, another speaker (speaker one) with the green colour code gives a suggestion, but approaches this with a vague speech style "it could...". There are a number of ways to convey uncertainty, such as using softeners like ambiguity, hedging, and other ambiguous language. Feminine idioms are spoken in these ways.

As the discussion progressed with different contributions, speaker two with the red colour code, expresses direct masculinity in requesting for a vote for "impact". He follows up after votes have been done with declaring the selection. There are indications of aggressive and direct assertion which are considered masculine speech styles.

Analysis of Female Group

The video clip transcript (Annotation) in Figures 3 and 4 below is used to analyse how women in the workplace communicate in terms of interpersonal and gender language.

Interpersonal Language

The discussion starts with a question and then followed up with another “what image do we want to...”. There is the use of “We” a lot in the sentence. This is an inclusive statement, intended to carry everyone involved along, towards the task at hand. The first question was task oriented however, the second, which contains a lot of pronouns is intend to express solidarity. This sparks a response and an indication to present an ideas, speaker four with colour code sky blue, replies with a backchannel response showing solidarity “yeah..” followed by a positive feedback signal “..What’s your name?” prompting the respondent to come forward with her suggestion. This is the use of backchannel, which is seen being used by speaker one, in expressing her liken to a suggestion, “yeah, I like ocean and water.”

Hedging indicated by the yellow colour code, is used numerous times throughout the discussion. As explained above the speaker's aggressiveness and potential face-threats are reduced as a result of the speech with the use of hedging. The use of hedging has implications for problem –solving in such interactions (Handford, 2010).

Figure 3: Female group

1. [Speaker One] "So, name a company or name the team?"
2. [Miriam] "What image do we want to give of ourselves we're strong women ... we're women who are positive and passionate ... and we're women who want to achieve a lot. So ... What... I think our name has to project all that."
3. [Speaker Three] "I've got a name."
4. [Speaker Four] "yeah ... what's your name?"
5. [Speaker Three] "Amelia"
6. [Speaker Four] "It's feminine" [Background: "yeah ... yeah ..."]
7. [Speaker Three] "I think I quite like that too"
8. [Speaker Six] "Amelia or Camellia?"
9. [Speaker One] "yeah ... like ocean and water"
10. [Speaker Seven] "I like ocean ... and waves ... and crashing ... and that sort of thing"
11. [Speaker Five] "Ok ... how about we explore fertility in some way?"
12. [Speaker One] "I like all the eternity and apple and all of ... I like all of that. But, does it really capture ... [Someone: sum up who we are ...] we are strong individuals here ... [Someone: yeah ...].. we are not pansies ... we are not lilies ... Do you know what I mean ... We wanna have some passion about that... [another speaker : but the only problem is what exactly ...] what does it mean though? ... what does it mean ... "
13. [Speaker Seven] "It's just abstract and tedious and I'd never remember it."
14. [Speaker Five] "But... We are going to go around ... "
15. [Speaker One] "I like direct, I think it is a strong word."
16. [Speaker Five] "It is very strong but it is not a good company name"
17. [Speaker One] "Why not? What. what... you got. when you say that sweetheart. ... you've got to say ... it's not a good word because ... "
18. [Speaker Three] "I think we have said that six or seven times now ... "
19. [Speaker One] "we all keep voting and nothing is happening .. so what... "
20. [Speaker Three] "So I go upfront"
21. [Speaker Six] "It sounds cheesy cliché.. school.. child .. stuff. ... really"
22. [background: "First forte ... first forte ... first forte ... oh my god ... are we going to agree .."]
23. [everyone cheers and claps]
24. [Speaker Three] "Let's see who's ... Who is willing to be the volun ... volunteer for project manager?"
25. [Speaker One] "I don't mind [background: okay .. okay .."]
26. [Speaker Three] "Saira, that's it done?"

Key

Green: Pronoun: Solidarity

Sky Blue: positive feedback signal: Showing solidarity

Yellow: Hedging

Pink: Backchannel: display of solidarity



Figure 3. Interpersonal

Gender Language

Speaker one, uses an intensifier while expressing her opinion about the suggestion made by one of the women. The use of an intensifier "really.." is a feminine language that like so, just, very, and quite which are some of the most common intensifiers used by women. Men and women both use the intensifier "so," but some say it is more common in women's speech. By using intensifiers, one tries to minimise the intensity of the other's strong emotions, as if to say: they feel passionately about something, but they are afraid to express how strongly they feel. The use of an intensifier like "so" in place of an absolute superlative (such, really, truly, absolutely) suggests that the speaker is trying to back out of a strong commitment to a position.

Figure 4: Female group

1. [Speaker One] "So, name a company or name the team?"
2. [Miriam] "What image do we want to give of ourselves we're strong women ... we're women who are positive and passionate ... and we're women who want to achieve a lot. So ... What... I think our name has to project all that."
3. [Speaker Three] "I've got a name."
4. [Speaker Four] "yeah ... what's your name?"
5. [Speaker Three] "Amelia"
6. [Speaker Four] "It's feminine" [Background: "yeah ... yeah ..."]
7. [Speaker Three] "I think I quite like that too"
8. [Speaker Six] "Amelia or Camellia?"
9. [Speaker One] "yeah ... like ocean and water"
10. [Speaker Seven] "I like ocean ... and waves ... and crashing ... and that sort of thing"
11. [Speaker Five] "Ok ... how about we explore fertility in some way?"
12. [Speaker One] "I like all the eternity and apple and all of ... I like all of that. But, does **it really** capture ... [Someone: sum up who we are ...] we are strong individuals here ... [Someone: yeah ...].. we are not pansies ... we are not lilies ... Do you know what I mean ... We wanna have some passion about that... [another speaker : but the only problem is what exactly ...] what does it mean though? ... what does it mean ..."
13. [Speaker Seven] "It's just abstract and tedious and I'd never remember it."
14. [Speaker Five] "But... We are going to go around ..."
15. [Speaker One] "I like direct, I think it is a strong word."
16. [Speaker Five] "It is very strong but it is not a good company name"
17. [Speaker One] "Why not? What. what... you got. when you say that sweetheart. ... you've got to say ... it's not a good word because ..."
18. [Speaker Three] "I think we have said that six or seven times now ..."
19. [Speaker One] "we all keep voting and nothing is happening ... so what..."
20. [Speaker Three] "So I go upfront"
21. [Speaker Six] "It sounds cheesy cliché.. school.. child .. stuff. **.. really**"
22. [background: "First forte ... first forte ... first forte ... oh my god ... are we going to agree ..."]
23. [everyone cheers and claps]
24. [Speaker Three] "Let's see who's ... **Who is willing to be the volun** ... volunteer for project manager?"
25. [Speaker One] "I don't mind [background: okay .. okay .."]
26. [Speaker Three] "Saira, **that's it done**?"

Key

Yellow: Intensifier

Blue: Person orientedt: Feminine

Red: Direct: Masculine



Figure 4. Gender language female group

"Who is willing to be the volunteer?" It is apparent that (the blue color-coded region in Figure 4) shows a genuine interest in the opinions of team members. It appears that the meeting was a success, based on the replies. Gender stereotypes in the workplace are further supported by these examples. Effective communication requires a delicate balancing act between the use of both in the correct circumstances.

Frequency Count of Gendered Language

Based on Holmes & Stubbes (2003), the gendered language indicators are enumerated in this section.

Table 1. Total Uses of Masculine and Feminine Features

Masculine Gendered Language		
Gendered Features	Male Group	Female group
Aggressive	1	0
Autonomous	0	0
Competitive	0	3
Confrontational	0	1
Direct	2	1
TOTAL	3	5
Feminine Gendered Language		
Gendered Feature	Male Group	Female Group
Collaborative	4	2
Facilitative	1	1
Indirect	0	0
Supportive	2	2
TOTAL	7	6

In this regard, it is important to note that instances might fall into more than one category—for example, a backchannel could be classified as both collaborative and supportive in nature. It has been observed that there is a difference in the usage of masculine gendered vocabulary between the male and female groups when comparing the two groups. The female group, on one hand, uses far more female-gendered vocabulary than the male group does. On the other hand, it may be argued that the female group placed too much emphasis on female-gendered language, which leaves greater space for objections from male colleagues.

A significant advantage of the male group's gendered language use is that it starts out by asking a straightforward question that may be classified as masculine, which in turn creates an atmosphere of unity among group members. Speaking Guy (who was subsequently picked as project manager) guided the path of the conversation with his comments and called for a vote, which is an excellent illustration of how male groups employ masculine language in their communication. Evidently, leaders succeed by influencing subordinates positively if they have a vast understanding of how gender reflects in workplace discourse because leadership entails a great deal of interpersonal communication (Kusbandono, et al., 2024). This aligns with the argument of Wahid, et al. (2024) on interpersonal communication.

The findings demonstrate that interpersonal communication in the two selected interactions cannot be explained through a rigid distinction between masculine and feminine speech. Both groups employed linguistic features conventionally associated with both gender categories. The male group, for example, used collaborative pronouns, humour, hedging, and supportive expressions alongside direct and task-oriented language. Similarly, the female group combined collaborative and supportive expressions with several competitive, confrontational, and direct features. This pattern supports the view that gendered communication features function as flexible interactional resources rather than fixed characteristics exclusively associated with male or female speakers. As Holmes and Stubbe (2003) suggest, the relationship

between gender and workplace discourse is shaped by the communicative situation, professional roles, and interpersonal objectives of the speakers.

Within the male-group interaction, the combination of directness and collaborative language contributed to the development of group solidarity and task progression. Direct questions and proposals established a clear orientation towards completing the assigned task, whereas inclusive pronouns such as “we” and expressions such as “let’s try” distributed responsibility among the group members. Although direct and task-oriented expressions have traditionally been associated with masculine communication (Merchant, 2012), their use in this interaction did not necessarily create an authoritarian environment. Instead, directness operated alongside humour, hedging, and collective pronouns, allowing authority to be exercised while maintaining interpersonal involvement. This finding illustrates Handford’s (2010) argument that workplace communication involves a continuous negotiation between informational and relational purposes.

Humour also served an important interpersonal function in the male-group discussion. Rather than merely entertaining the participants, it reduced potential tension and created a sense of shared identity. This function is consistent with Hay’s (2000) explanation that humour can establish solidarity and manage interpersonal relationships within group interactions. The presence of hedging, particularly through expressions such as “I think” and conditional statements, further moderated potentially face-threatening suggestions. These expressions allowed speakers to contribute ideas without presenting their positions as final or non-negotiable. Consequently, the male-group interaction shows that directness and mitigation can operate together: direct language may maintain task focus, while hedging and humour help preserve cooperation.

The female-group interaction was characterised by an interaction between supportive participation and negotiation of competing positions. Inclusive pronouns, backchannels, positive feedback, and invitations to contribute encouraged involvement and demonstrated attention to the perspectives of other group members. In accordance with Handford’s (2010) framework, these features supported solidarity and interpersonal engagement. However, the use of hedging and intensification also indicated that participants were negotiating the strength of their positions and managing possible disagreement. Hedging should therefore not automatically be interpreted as uncertainty or weakness. In this context, it functioned as a pragmatic strategy that enabled participants to present opinions, respond to competing proposals, and maintain working relationships during the discussion.

The descriptive frequency counts further demonstrate the limitations of assigning communication features exclusively according to the speakers’ gender. The male group produced three instances classified as masculine and seven classified as feminine, whereas the female group produced five masculine and six feminine instances. The difference between the groups was therefore relatively small, particularly in the use of feminine-coded features. Moreover, the female group displayed more masculine-coded features than the male group, especially competitive and confrontational expressions. These findings challenge the expectation that male speakers will necessarily employ more masculine language or that female speakers will primarily rely on feminine language. Instead, speakers appear to select communicative strategies in response to task demands, emerging group roles, and the immediate direction of the interaction.

From a leadership perspective, the findings indicate that effective group communication may depend on combining task-oriented and relationship-oriented strategies. In the male group, direct proposals and the request for a vote supported movement towards a collective decision, while humour, hedging, and inclusive expressions maintained group cohesion. In the female group, invitations to participate, supportive responses, and collaborative expressions facilitated involvement, although competing suggestions produced a less linear decision-making process. These differences should not be interpreted as evidence that one gender is inherently more effective in leadership. Rather, they illustrate how leadership is interactionally constructed

through the management of authority, participation, solidarity, and task completion. This interpretation is consistent with Kusbandono et al. (2024), who emphasise the importance of interpersonal communication in leadership, and Wahid et al. (2024), who argue that positive communication skills contribute to productive workplace relationships.

The findings also reinforce the relevance of institutional and situational context in analysing workplace discourse. As Coffelt et al. (2019) observe, workplace communication is influenced by organisational culture, occupational expectations, and the nature of the work environment. Although *The Apprentice* simulates workplace tasks and leadership situations, it is also a competitive and edited television programme. Participants communicate while being observed and evaluated, and the broadcast material represents selected portions of longer interactions. Therefore, the communication patterns identified in this study should be interpreted as features of the two selected reality-workplace interactions rather than as general characteristics of male and female communication across workplaces.

the study shows that gendered language is not used in a simple or uniform manner. Masculine- and feminine-coded features intersect within both groups and perform different functions according to the interactional context. Directness can promote task progression without necessarily undermining collaboration, while hedging, backchannels, humour, and supportive expressions can protect interpersonal relationships and encourage participation. For workplace leaders, the principal implication is not that one gendered communication style is superior, but that effective communication requires the ability to balance clarity and direction with solidarity, responsiveness, and sensitivity to the contributions of others.

CONCLUSION

Leaders who want to be great communicators must be aware of the situations in which they speak and converse in order to use interpersonal language or gendered language appropriately. This study's findings are based on transcript analysis, which shows that the male team members had an overall affection and solidarity with humour and hedging that encouraged empowerment and constructive dialogue. Though hedging, ambiguity, showing solidarity, empathy, and collaborative and supportive language were present in the female team, the debate was less fluid because there was a lot of usage of hedges and to dilute disagreement. Because straightforward language was utilised to avoid trivialising topics, it was interesting. The use of collaborative language in decision-making was prevalent. The male team leader used interpersonal language and masculine speaking patterns to guide the team to a shared agreement. He was more effective in motivating his colleagues and making them feel happy. In the end, it was determined that male leaders were more effective than female leaders.

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