

Exploring Women's Leadership Communication in Masculine Logistics Industry: A Qualitative Study in the Delivery Service Sector

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

Women Leadership; Masculine; Logistic
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This research critically analyzes how women's leadership is constructed, interpreted, and negotiated within a male-dominated delivery service organization. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research aims to explore how female leaders build authority, gain acceptance, and manage power dynamics in a masculine work culture. The findings of this study indicate that women's leadership is shaped by emotional-relational communication practices that emphasize empathy, listening skills, and responsibility, but is often limited by patriarchal norms that influence employee perceptions and interactions. Female leaders employ adaptive strategies such as emotional management and relational network building to maintain their professionalism and legitimacy as leaders. The results of this study also confirm that women's leadership in the masculine sector is dynamic, but still negotiated and has the potential to shape a more inclusive communication culture. This research contributes to the study of organizational communication and gender by demonstrating how empathy-based leadership can challenge traditional hierarchies and promote more equitable and human-value-oriented communication practices.

1. Introduction

The shipping services industry has long been considered a male-dominated industry, characterized by the dominance of male workers and a work culture that emphasizes speed, accuracy, and efficiency (Hopkins & Akyelken, 2022). These physical burdens and safety risks are considered incompatible with female body stereotypes, which is why their representation in managerial positions remains highly open (Veljovic & Tadic, 2024). Data shows that women's participation in this sector is around 1-2% (Duxfield & Allen, 2025), and according to data from Indonesia's Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in 2022, the average female leadership in Indonesia reached 32.26%. This gap highlights the structural and cultural barriers faced by women in the delivery service industry.

Although various studies on women's leadership still discuss the corporate, political, and educational contexts, research on how gender-based power dynamics operate in the courier industry, particularly in Indonesia, is still very limited. Patriarchal culture is at the root of these challenges, where women face a double expectation: to achieve in the public sphere and to shoulder domestic responsibilities (Oktaviani, 2024). As a result, women's leadership is often evaluated thru a double standard, such as being considered too soft, lacking authority, and being too assertive, which is seen as rude (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023). This phenomenon reinforces gender stigma and limits women's leadership space, despite various figures in Indonesia and internationally having proven inclusive, responsive, and humanistic leadership in facing crises and driving socio-economic change.

In the context of this research, this study aims to investigate how women's leadership is constructed, interpreted, and negotiated in male-dominated industries. Based on a critical perspective, particularly Acker's (1990) Gendered Organization Theory, this research examines the dynamics of acceptance, legitimacy, and power relations faced by female leaders, specifically in the courier service industry. Thus, this research enriches the study of organizational communication and gender, and provides empirical contributions to understanding women's leadership strategies in the patriarchal bias of a masculine industry.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative case study approach aimed at understanding how women's leadership is constructed and practiced in male-dominated work environments, specifically within the shipping service industry at PT XPS LINK. The research is based on a critical paradigm and data analysis, aiming to critique patriarchal ideology and uncover gender ideology, power structures, and forms of resistance implied in organizational communication practices, particularly within the shipping service industry. The analysis process is conducted reflectively by deeply rereading the narrative and social context. To ensure the validity of the findings, this study employed source and technique triangulation by comparing interview, observation, and document data from PT XPS-LINK.

3. Result and Discussion

The Construction of Women's Leadership in a Male-Dominated Industry

The findings of this study indicate that women's leadership in the delivery service industry is built through emotional and relational communication practices, which means this communication emphasizes empathy, listening skills, and responsibility. Female leaders position themselves not as authoritarian leaders, but as facilitators who bridge the gap between operational efficiency and human values. Based on interview results, some employees described their female leaders as providing clear instructions while still allowing for open discussion. However, some employees also admitted to feeling uncomfortable when given advice by their team leaders regarding work or personal matters, as it was perceived as excessive interference in their work or personal affairs. This indicates that, although his communication style aims to build relational closeness, expressions of empathy are perceived and interpreted negatively due to the persistent patriarchal cultural bias against employees' perception of his leadership.

This finding aligns with the research by Dunlop and Scheepers (2023), which states that female leaders in masculine sectors often face a double standard, where they are expected to be assertive but not lose their femininity. Thus, the authority of female leadership in the shipping services industry is not fixed, but is constantly negotiated through everyday communication practices that balance assertiveness and empathy.

Dynamics of Acceptance toward Women's Leadership

Acceptance of female leadership in the shipping services industry is still partial and contextual. Most of their employees acknowledge the competence of their female leaders, particularly in decision-making and operational management. However, implicit resistance is still visible in everyday interactions. For example, during the observation, the researcher found that a male employee avoided eye contact and was cold toward his female leader, indicating a form of subtle resistance rooted in gender stereotypes. An informant also corroborated this statement, saying, "Sometimes I feel uncomfortable when he corrects or reminds me about personal things; it feels like he's crossing a line" (Interview, June 2024). This statement indicates that emotional and relational communication styles aimed at building closeness are actually interpreted negatively because patriarchal norms are still deeply ingrained in workplace culture.

This finding aligns with Acker's (1990) concept of gendered substructures, which explains how organizational practices unconsciously reproduce gender hierarchies through patterns of interaction. Additionally, these findings align with Ferguson's (2019) research, which states that the subtle resistance experienced by female leaders indicates that emotional labor serves as an ongoing

negotiation of legitimacy and authority in male-dominated work environments. Unlike previous research, this study shows that gender bias in the delivery service sector often operates implicitly thru micro-behaviors, communication tone, and body language, sometimes revealing masculine dominance within organizational culture. Thus, the acceptance of female leadership is not a fixed condition, but rather a continuous communication process negotiated within the power dynamics prevailing in the workplace.

Survival Strategies

Female leaders in the express shipping industry employ various strategies to navigate patriarchal structures, such as emotional management, building relational networks, and adjusting their positions within the power context. This means female leaders maintain professionalism in every decision while using empathy as an instrument of subtle influence to gain legitimacy. For example, when an employee exhibits uncooperative behavior, he prefers to discuss it privately rather than reprimanding them in public. This approach helps maintain authority while strengthening interpersonal relationships.

This finding aligns with Ferguson's (2019) view that women's leadership involves continuous emotional labor to balance authority and acceptance.

Power Dynamics in a Male-Dominated Workplace

Power dynamics within delivery service organizations indicate that masculine norms still influence leadership interpretation. Resistance, such as delaying tasks or avoiding eye contact, reflects gender bias. This aligns with Acker's (1990) view, which states that organizations are gendered spaces where power operates thru social practices and meanings.

4. Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that women's leadership in delivery services is an ongoing process of negotiating power, identity, and acceptance within a masculine organizational culture. Leadership is not just a managerial function, but also a communication process shaped by gender-based norms and structural expectations in the workplace.

The findings of this research focus on examining feminist organizational communication, highlighting how gender-based communication practices shape legitimacy and authority in everyday work interactions. Although this research focuses on a single case study, its findings will open opportunities for further research to examine similar dynamics in the male-dominated delivery service sector. Additionally, comparative or longitudinal studies are recommended to understand how gender relations, communication, and power structures evolve in different organizational contexts over time.

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