

THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING IN WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP WITHIN A MASCULINE INDUSTRY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF A DELIVERY SERVICE COMPANY

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ABSTRACT: The delivery service industry is dominated by a masculine culture that hinders women's leadership through gender stereotypes, stigmatization, and patriarchal organizational structures. This study aims to reveal the construction of women's leadership meanings, employee acceptance, and their navigation strategies at PT XPS-LINK, Bali, Indonesia. A qualitative method with a critical paradigm was employed, involving in-depth semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, documentation, and critical thematic analysis for data triangulation. Findings indicate that women's leadership is negatively constructed via labels like bossy or nagging, double evaluative standards, double bind dilemmas between assertiveness and empathy, and hegemonic masculinity in organizational practices. Nevertheless, female leaders negotiate legitimacy through relational communication. The conclusion states that women's leadership is a discursive arena fraught with gender power tensions, urging organizations to foster inclusive cultures for equal symbolic legitimacy.

Keywords: Women's Leadership; Masculine Industry; Gender Bias; Organizational Communication; Role Congruity

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INTRODUCTION

The delivery service industry is known as a highly masculine sector. A highly masculine sector refers to one that is systematically dominated by male workers, driven by stereotypes regarding physical labor, cultural norms, limited representation of female workers particularly in managerial positions and structural barriers that hinder women's advancement in this sector (Hopkins & Akyelken, 2022). According to (Wong, 2020), the masculine nature of the delivery service industry is reflected in a work environment shaped by the image of hegemonic masculinity, namely an organizational culture that emphasizes physical strength, endurance, constant mobility, and the ability to take risks both on the road and in fast-paced operational settings. This masculine image becomes the standard that determines who is perceived as competent and worthy of social acceptance within the sector (Wong, 2020). In addition, as part of the logistics and transportation industry, the delivery service sector is also demographically dominated by men, particularly in key roles such as drivers, warehouse operators, and operational managers (Haryono, 2020).

As a result, female leaders often face biased assessments of competence and role dilemmas, or a double bind, due to gender stereotypes that assume women's leadership is incompatible with dominantly masculine leadership expectations (Elsesser & Lever, 2011). Furthermore, female leaders frequently encounter limited access to leadership and career opportunities, such as promotions, mentoring, and career development assignments, within structural barriers that contribute to the glass ceiling effect (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). This condition not only creates social isolation and additional emotional burdens for women but also increases the risk of tokenism, in which women are appointed merely as symbols of representation without being granted full authority (Ghosh & Barber, 2021).

This is characterized by a demanding, competitive work culture oriented toward efficiency, speed, and accuracy. Previous studies have revealed that the delivery service industry has historically been highly masculine because it is dominated by men, as reflected in its demanding work culture, which emphasizes physical resilience and intense competition while prioritizing efficiency, speed, accuracy, and competitiveness. In addition, the delivery service industry has a hierarchical and male-dominated structure, both in operational and managerial positions. Women who enter this sector consistently face structural and cultural challenges. This condition causes women to feel limited in their roles and contributions. A study by Selamoglu (2022) states that there has been a drastic decline in women's representation at the leadership level, such as in director positions, within the delivery service industry. Moreover, data indicate that, globally, only approximately 1–2% of workers in the delivery service sector are women, reflecting the low participation of women in an industry that remains largely dominated by men (Selamoglu, 2022). Furthermore, data from (Bulmer et al., 2021) reveal that in Spain, only approximately 8% of leadership positions in the delivery service sector are held by women. This indicates that the industry remains male-dominated.

Male dominance in the delivery service sector can serve as a barrier for women, both physically and socially (Rahman, 2025). In the prominent theory of gender and organizations, (Acker, 1990) argues that organizations are created and designed for a masculine world. As a result, women, who are stereotypically perceived as feminine, experience difficulties in adapting to the work environment. However, rather than requiring women to adapt to a masculine environment, feminist organizational communication scholars argue that organizational practices should be redesigned to make them more equitable and inclusive (Buzzanell, 2021).

Specifically, in the delivery service industry, job demands that require excellent physical condition, field safety, and unpredictable working hours, such as returning home late at night, tend to pose greater risks for women, making them less interested in entering this industry. In addition, from the perspective of social life, there is cultural pressure in the form of gender stereotypes, such as the perception that the delivery service industry is a demanding, dirty, and risky form of men's work. Consequently, when women enter the field of delivery services, they may be perceived as deviating from social expectations or may experience pressure from society because women are expected to choose occupations that are considered gentler. In fact, this condition could be improved through better industry regulation, including more appropriate working-hour arrangements and improvements in occupational safety and health standards.

Research generally shows that women often face barriers in career advancement due to gender bias that questions their leadership abilities, as they are frequently perceived as less assertive, less capable of taking risks, or unsuitable for leadership in the delivery service industry, which is regarded as masculine (Koburtay et al., 2019). In addition, women often encounter a double burden, namely work demands and family responsibilities, while the lack of inspiring female leadership figures further narrows women's opportunities to advance to leadership positions (Rahman, 2025). According to (Ekawati, 2022) this occurs because of the discrepancy between leadership stereotypes, which are considered masculine, and gender stereotypes of female leaders, who are expected to be feminine. Therefore, many female leaders must balance masculinity and femininity in their leadership in order to be more socially accepted (Adamson, 2017; Oktaviani, 2024). Based on the results of preliminary interviews with two members of PT XPS LINK, both female and male employees perceived the female CEO as someone who was "harsh," whereas the male manager was perceived as firm, which was interpreted as authoritative. Upon further examination, the term "harsh" in this context represents the assertiveness of a female leader. This reflects findings in the literature, in which the assertiveness of female leaders is often associated with negative attributes. For example, Margaret Thatcher, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, was associated with the title "Iron Lady" (Setiadi, 2024). In Indonesia, former minister Risma Tri Maharini has often been portrayed as a harsh figure rather than as an assertive one, regardless of her success as the mayor of Surabaya (Oktaviani, 2022).

In Indonesia, trends indicate that women's representation in leadership positions remains low. Based on 2023 data from the Indonesia Business Coalition for Women Empowerment (IBCWE) on leadership, women accounted for 15% of executive positions in the top 200 companies, and there have been only eight female CEOs across all companies since 2019. In the political sector, according to data from the General Elections Commission of the Republic of Indonesia (KPU) in 2024, only 21.9% of women succeeded in occupying legislative seats in the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR RI). In the health sector, based on Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) 200 data, women occupied approximately 27% of executive positions. In the transportation and logistics sector, based on Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) 200 data, less than 10% of executive positions were held by women. In addition, data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) in 2022 recorded that approximately 32.26% of women occupied leadership positions in Indonesia. Meanwhile, in 2023, Statistics Indonesia (BPS) recorded that approximately 35.02% of women occupied leadership positions.

From a cultural perspective, patriarchy remains deeply embedded in society. This condition is influenced by traditional values that place women in dual roles; for example, in the public sphere, they are expected to achieve professional success, while in the domestic sphere, they are still expected to fulfil household responsibilities in accordance with prevailing norms (Ekawati, 2022). This means that women's success as leaders is measured not only by their achievements but also by their ability to perform domestic roles in accordance with traditional feminine values (Oktaviani, 2024). In addition, traditional views rooted in patriarchal culture, which perceive women as emotional and less prudent, further reinforce the stereotype that women are not suitable for leadership positions.

Challenges faced by female leaders occur not only before they become leaders but also during their tenure. Role Congruity Theory posits that women's leadership is evaluated through two aspects: (1) Masculinity or agentic competence, which means that leadership positions are often associated with masculine traits, such as assertiveness, independence, and results orientation. This condition causes women leaders to be socially expected to display masculine qualities. If women leaders are too gentle or collaborative, they are perceived as weak; conversely, if they are too firm or assertive, they are labelled as harsh, as in the case of Margaret Thatcher, who was known as the "Iron Lady" because of her assertiveness (Putra et al., 2024), and Susi Pudjiastuti, who was described as a powerful woman because of her assertive leadership and unconventional actions. (2) Communal competence, which means that women leaders are often evaluated based on their ability to build interpersonal relationships, empathy, and collaboration (Dzivhani, 2016).

Gender practices within PT XPS LINK in the delivery service industry indicate that female leaders often face tangible pressures and barriers. Based on a preliminary interview with the company's female CEO, it was revealed that one female leader was forced to return to work only

one month after giving birth. In fact, according to Law Number 13 of 2003, Article 82, concerning Manpower, female workers are entitled to three months of maternity leave (Putra et al., 2024). The absence of a replacement during the leave period caused the female leader at PT XPS LINK to experience physical and psychological pressure. In addition, through preliminary interviews with two employees of PT XPS LINK, it was found that in one team led by a female manager, there was an employee who focused only on a single task, thereby hindering the timely completion of the team's work. Moreover, when the female leader was absent, there was no replacement to handle the work, creating pressure and a potential risk of performance evaluation for the leader. This phenomenon indicates that women face challenges not only before occupying leadership positions but also while performing their roles within a masculine organizational structure and under high job demands (Lőre, & Ablonczy-Mihályka, 2025). This condition is consistent with the assumptions of Role Congruity Theory, which states that in industries socially constructed as highly masculine, the incongruity between gender roles and leadership roles becomes increasingly pronounced, thereby intensifying barriers for female leaders.

In the context of Role Congruity Theory, female leaders often face a double bind. When they are too communal, meaning warm and collaborative, they are perceived as weak; however, when they are too agentic, meaning firm and assertive, they are considered to violate feminine norms and are at risk of receiving backlash (Lawless, B., & Chen, 2019). In navigating these pressures, female leaders often adopt compensatory strategies by combining agentic and communal elements, for example by displaying assertiveness while also demonstrating empathy as a way to build legitimacy and enhance social acceptance within the organization. This phenomenon is also reflected in the preliminary findings at PT XPS LINK, where the assertiveness of female leaders is often interpreted by employees as being harsh. This indicates that agentic behaviours displayed by women continue to be evaluated negatively because they are perceived as inconsistent with the gender stereotypes attached to them (Reynolds, 2024).

This perception emerges because women's leadership is often evaluated through the lens of gender stereotypes that are incongruent with leadership characteristics (Chikwe, et al., 2024). When women demonstrate assertiveness, such behaviour is often interpreted negatively because it contradicts the social construction that expects women to be gentle and emotional (Tremmel & Wahl, 2023). Meanwhile, leadership has historically been associated with masculine traits such as control, assertiveness, and dominance, requiring women to navigate two conflicting demands: norms of femininity and stereotypes of masculine leadership (Opoku, A., & Williams, 2018). If they are too assertive, they are judged as violating gender norms; however, if they are too feminine, they are perceived as weak and insufficiently assertive (Dzivhani, 2016). Even when women demonstrate friendliness or excessive attentiveness, they are perceived as lacking authority as leaders (Tremmel & Wahl, 2023). This condition creates a double standard that requires women to meet two contradictory criteria in order to be recognized as credible leaders (Biernat, M., & Kobrynowicz, 1997).

The preliminary interview findings at PT XPS LINK further reinforce the depiction presented in Role Congruity Theory. One employee of PT XPS LINK stated that there is a gender-based division of roles in the company's work routines, in which emotional and relational tasks, such as handling customer complaints and managing finances, are more frequently assigned to female leaders, whereas operational tasks that are perceived as technical and masculine tend to be assigned to male leaders. This situation indicates the presence of gender bias that continues to influence how female and male leadership are accepted by society within the organizational context.

Miscommunication was also found within PT XPS LINK regarding the flow of information. For example, the operational division submitted reports only to male leaders and did not convey them to female leaders, even though the information was needed by the female CEO. This was emphasized by one member of the accounting division, who stated, "Miscommunication frequently occurs regarding the flow of information. For instance, operational reports are submitted only to one male leader, while the female CEO does not receive the information, even though the report is needed for decision-making. This condition creates obstacles for the female CEO in carrying out her duties, and strategic decisions are delayed merely because of miscommunication." These preliminary findings confirm the presence of perceptual bias, role inequality, and symbolic resistance that are directly related to the concepts of double bind and

role incongruity in Role Congruity Theory (Rudman, L. A., Moss-Racusin, C. A., Phelan, J. E., & Nauts, 2021).

Despite facing various challenges and social stigma, many female leaders have succeeded in their leadership roles. At the international level, for example, Jacinda Ardern served as the Prime Minister of New Zealand from 2017 to 2023. Her achievements included managing the COVID-19 pandemic through a swift and empathetic strategy, reflected in the message “stay home, save lives,” as well as implementing a firearms ban following the Christchurch shooting. Another example is Tsai Ing-wen, who has served as the President of Taiwan from 2016 to the present. Her achievements include highly effective COVID-19 management and the strengthening of a robust democratic foundation amid geopolitical pressure from China. In Indonesia, Tri Rismaharini, a former mayor and Minister of Social Affairs in 2010 and 2020, respectively, achieved notable success during her tenure as Mayor of Surabaya by closing the Dolly prostitution area and receiving the Adipura Paripurna award. She has also led various social programs as Minister of Social Affairs. Another example is Susi Pudjiastuti, who served as Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries from 2014 to 2019. Her achievements included sinking hundreds of vessels involved in illegal fishing as a firm measure to eradicate illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, increasing the Fishermen’s Terms of Trade from approximately 104.63 in 2014 to approximately 113.28 in 2018, receiving an honorary doctorate from Diponegoro University for her contributions to marine and fisheries development policy, and achieving a high public satisfaction rate as a minister, at approximately 91.9%. In the delivery service industry, Carol B. Tomé, the CEO of United Parcel Service (UPS), is another prominent example. Her achievements include becoming the first woman to hold the position of CEO at UPS, the largest delivery company in the United States. Under her leadership, UPS recorded significant improvements in operational efficiency, including the expansion of same-day delivery and major investments in Europe, thereby accelerating the company’s innovation and growth.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

From the organizational perspective, organizations that tend to adhere to a patriarchal culture prioritize hierarchical, control-based, and results-oriented leadership. Consequently, feminist leadership values among women, such as empathy, interpersonal communication, and social concern, are often considered inappropriate. For example, in Spain, women account for only 8.4% of managers in the delivery service sector (Barge, J. K., & Little, 2008).

In organizational communication studies, there are three main approaches to understanding organizational dynamics: functionalist, interpretive, and critical approaches (Cheney, G., Christensen, L. T., Zorn, T. E., Jr., & Ganesh, 2010). These three approaches have different basic assumptions. The functionalist approach views organizations as rational, structured systems oriented toward shared goals, with an emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness, and measurable performance. Communication is understood as a means of technical coordination to support productivity and stability. The interpretive approach views organizations as social realities that are collectively constructed through symbolic interaction, focusing on meaning, culture, and organizational identity. In this approach, communication is understood as a symbolic process that shapes social reality and creates shared understanding, while researchers take a participatory position through interviews, observation, and narrative analysis. The third approach is the critical approach, which positions organizations as arenas of conflicting interests, power reproduction, and ideological domination. This approach assumes that organizational structures are embedded with power relations that often perpetuate inequalities, including gender-based inequalities. Its focus lies in how communication can reproduce or challenge domination and how subordinated groups, such as women, engage in symbolic resistance, which is usually examined through critical discourse analysis, poststructuralism, and critical ethnography.

The critical approach is highly relevant because the main issues examined in this study relate to the dominance of masculinity in the delivery service industry, gender bias, and structural barriers to women’s leadership. By adopting a critical approach, this study seeks not only to understand women’s experiences within organizations but also to examine how organizations shape, constrain, or even provide space for change through the communication strategies employed by female leaders. This approach enables the researcher to uncover the basic

organizational assumptions that have long been regarded as neutral, such as the concept of the “ideal leader,” which tends to be biased toward masculinity (Acker, 1990), as well as to examine how symbolic resistance is carried out through feminist communication styles that are empathetic, collaborative, and transformative.

Based on a review of previous studies, feminist researchers, most of whom draw on organizational and gender studies, have demonstrated the benefits of organizations implementing systems that are more equitable, humanistic, and grounded in cultural context. (Wang, M., & Kelan, 2013) showed that the implementation of a 40% gender quota for female directors on the boards of Norwegian public companies from 2001 to 2010 successfully created “fertile ground” for women to advance to the roles of Board Chair and CEO. Furthermore, (Ford, J., & Morgan, 2023) examined established leadership discourse through a feminist perspective by critiquing the gender bias internalized in leadership theory and practice. (Mavin, S., & Yusupova, 2023) revealed how female leaders in patriarchal neoliberal organizations formulate narrative strategies to remain competitive without violating gender norms. Meanwhile, several other studies, particularly those conducted in Indonesia, have focused more on a functionalist perspective. For example, (Martin, B., Andler, S., & Tiberius, 2025) formulated an empirical framework consisting of four dimensions: personal characteristics, gender attribution, leadership behaviour, and contextual factors, to understand the emergence and effectiveness of women’s leadership. (Daryono, 2024) explored the concept of Collaborative Interaction Women Leadership (CIWL) in improving employee performance and satisfaction in MSMEs in Banyumas, Indonesia through collaborative synergy. The strength of this study lies in the development and validation of the Collaborative Interaction Women Leadership (CIWL) concept, which is contextualized within the MSME environment.

Research within the critical tradition continues to identify barriers experienced by female leaders in navigating masculine environments. For example, Adamson (2016) examined the construction of post-feminism in the autobiographies of female CEOs, revealing that ideal female leaders in the Western context are expected to balance the demands of femininity in a way that remains profitable. (Rudman, L. A., Moss-Racusin, C. A., Phelan, J. E., & Nauts, 2021) explored the backlash effect that emerges when female leaders exceed gender expectations, with a focus on interpersonal conflict as a mediator. This indicates that becoming a female leader is not an easy process. In addition, (Schade, 2023) who reviewed the effectiveness of women’s leadership in the digital era, revealed that although technology has developed, traditional gender-biased narratives remain reinforced. However, (Schade, 2023) also argued that the implementation of affirmative policies, such as gender quotas, creates “fertile ground” for women to enter executive positions.

The aforementioned studies on female leaders are still grounded in gender and organizational studies. This study offers novelty by addressing gender issues from the perspective of feminist organizational communication. The strength and novelty of this study lie in its perspective on leadership, which is understood not merely as something possessed by individuals but as a communication process involving superior–subordinate relations and the social dynamics within them. In addition, this study is a continuation of (Oktaviani, 2024), with a focus on how leadership is understood through communication practices and processes of acceptance within the organizational context (Oktaviani, 2024). From this perspective, women’s leadership constitutes a site of discursive struggle in which the meaning of leadership is negotiated, rejected, and rearticulated (Arendt, H., & Buzzanell, 2019). By integrating this theory into the context of patriarchal culture in Indonesia, this study offers new insights into how female leaders confront and challenge gender-biased organizational structures. Women’s leadership in this study is not merely an attribute that is possessed, but is formed through meanings jointly constructed by leaders and their employees. This approach not only enriches gender-based leadership theory but also broadens the understanding of organizational communication dynamics in masculine and exclusive industries, while providing a meaningful contribution to the development of more just and equitable theories and practices of organizational communication.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study refers to qualitative research with a critical paradigm. The reason the researcher adopted qualitative research with a critical paradigm is that this study does not merely aim to

understand social experiences but also seeks to reveal and critique injustices embedded in social structures, such as those experienced by female leaders in the delivery service industry (Creswell, 2009; Sugiyono, 2022). The research was conducted at the office of PT XPS-LINK, Bali. The focus of this study is on how women's leadership is interpreted and constructed, employees' acceptance of female leadership, and the strategies used by female leaders in navigating their leadership within organizations in the delivery service industry.

The data collection techniques in this study are divided into four types: observation, interviews, documentation, and triangulation or a combination of techniques (Sugiyono, 2022). The researcher used in-depth interviews with a semi-structured model as the primary data collection technique. The researcher also employed covert observation and active participant observation. The data collection procedure in this study was carried out gradually and systematically while prioritizing the principles of research ethics.

The data analysis technique in this study used an iterative approach, which combines inductive and deductive coding gradually and repeatedly. The analysis process began with the data familiarization stage, or pre-coding, in which the researcher repeatedly read and examined all raw data in the form of in-depth interview transcripts and observation notes. In this study, the researcher used Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA), developed by (Lawless, B., & Chen, 2019). Critical Thematic Analysis focuses not only on identifying thematic patterns but also positions power relations, gender ideology, and social structures as the primary analytical lenses for understanding informants' experiences (Lawless, B., & Chen, 2019).

The data validity technique in this study used triangulation. Triangulation is a process of checking data using three methods, namely source triangulation, technique triangulation, and time triangulation (Sugiyono, 2022).

RESULTS

Stigmatization of Women's Leadership in Organizational Discourse

The research findings indicate that women's leadership at PT XPS-LINK is often constructed through negative labelling. The assertiveness frequently displayed by female leaders is not always interpreted as a professional leadership practice; rather, it is reduced to a personal characteristic. An informant with the initials TS, who is the CEO of PT XPS-LINK, stated:

"When women occupy strategic positions and speak assertively, the response that often emerges is not about substance, but about labels, such as being nagging, overly detailed, or emotional."

This labelling indicates that women's communicative actions are more often personalized than evaluated functionally. This stigmatization also appears through attention to technical aspects of communication, such as vocal intonation. One informant with the initials INRA, a sales marketing employee, stated:

"The problem is more related to intonation or speech; in other words, the tone of voice of the female CEO and the female accounting manager is somewhat high."

Nevertheless, women's assertiveness does not always have negative implications. One informant with the initials IGPRL, an accounting employee, instead stated:

"That assertiveness actually makes us feel safe."

However, the boundary between assertiveness and negative labelling remains ambiguous, as reflected in the statement of the same informant, IGPRL, an accounting employee:

"When assertiveness turns into being nagging, it actually creates discomfort."

These findings show that stigmatization operates inconsistently and depends on social perceptions of female leaders.

Gender Bias in Leadership Evaluation

The research findings indicate the presence of gender-based double standards in evaluating leadership. Informants stated that the decisions made by female leaders are often questioned not because of their content, but because of the manner in which they are communicated and the identity of the person delivering them. One informant with the initials TS, who is the CEO of PT XPS-LINK, stated:

“There are moments when my decisions are questioned not because of their substance, but because of the way I communicate them as a woman.”

This indicates that leadership evaluation is not yet entirely based on performance. This bias becomes even more apparent in direct comparison with male leaders. An informant with the initials IKS, a Data Entry Supervisor, stated:

“When instructions are delivered by male leaders, they are usually carried out immediately.”

Meanwhile, another informant with the initials INRA, a sales marketing employee, also stated:

“Sometimes instructions from female leaders are received differently by employees.”

Even in everyday communication practices, another informant with the initials DP, an HRD employee, stated:

“In my opinion, this is not about the content of the instruction, but about who delivers it.”

These findings affirm that the acceptance of authority is still strongly influenced by gender constructions within the organization.

The Double Bind Dilemma in Women's Leadership Practices

The results of the analysis show that female leaders experience a double bind dilemma in carrying out their leadership roles. Informants revealed an ongoing tension between the demands of assertiveness and empathy. One informant with the initials TS, who is the CEO of PT XPS-LINK, stated:

“There are moments when I feel that I have to be tougher in order to be respected, but on the other hand, I do not want to lose my empathy. That dilemma is always present.”

This uncertainty causes female leaders to continuously consider the meaning of their communicative actions. This dilemma becomes more evident in the practice of giving reprimands and making decisions. The informant with the initials TS, the CEO of PT XPS-LINK, explained:

“When I am assertive and direct, some employees perceive me as harsh or emotional. However, when I try to be more empathetic, that attitude is sometimes considered insufficiently firm.”

A similar situation was also described by the informant with the initials TS, the CEO of PT XPS-LINK:

“I often have to consider whether my assertiveness will be interpreted as professionalism or instead regarded as excessive.”

As a result, female leaders feel the need to be more cautious and consistent so that their messages are still accepted without generating negative perceptions.

Hegemonic Masculinity in Organizational Structures and Practices

The results of the analysis show that women's leadership practices at PT XPS LINK take place within an organizational structure that remains dominated by masculine values. An informant with the initials SDS, who is the Marketing and Customer Relations Manager, stated:

"The work culture in this company is still strongly influenced by masculine values, such as results orientation, speed, assertiveness, and a strong hierarchy."

These values shape the standard of ideal leadership that is implicitly attached to male figures, causing women's leadership to often be perceived as not fully aligned with dominant norms. This dominance of masculinity is also reflected in the way leadership legitimacy is granted. One informant with the initials IKS, a Data Entry Supervisor, stated:

"When instructions are delivered by male leaders, they are usually carried out immediately."

This statement indicates that male authority has been internalized as a normative form of leadership within the organization.

In managerial forums, this condition affects the communicative burden of female leaders. An informant with the initials SDS, the Marketing and Customer Relations Manager, stated:

"Female leaders do need to explain their arguments in a more detailed and structured manner so that their opinions can be accepted."

These findings affirm that hegemonic masculinity is not merely present as an abstract structure, but operates concretely in everyday communication practices and decision-making processes.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that women's leadership at PT XPS-LINK is constructed through stigmatizing practices, such as being labelled "harsh," "nagging," and "complicated." This stigma does not emerge merely at the individual level but operates as a symbolic procedure that regulates who is considered legitimate as a leader. This finding is consistent with (Acker, 1990) Theory of Gendered Organizations, which argues that organizations are fundamentally built upon the logic of masculinity, causing women's communication styles to often be positioned as biased. From the perspective of critical organizational communication, language and labels are not merely descriptive but serve as instruments of power that produce inequality (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004). This means that stigma against female leaders functions as a communicative practice that maintains masculine domination within organizational structures, particularly in the delivery service industry (See Figure 1 for workplace interaction).



Figure 1. Communication Interaction between Female Leaders and Operational Employees

In addition, the legitimacy of women's leadership is not automatically attached to structural positions but must be continuously negotiated through performance demonstration and

communication practices. Instructions delivered by female leaders are often questioned compared with those delivered by male leaders, even when the substance of the policy is similar. This phenomenon is consistent with Symbolic Interactionism theory in organizations, which emphasizes that the meaning of leadership is formed through interaction and social evaluation (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Furthermore, evaluative bias is also in line with the findings of (Elsesser & Lever, 2011), who state that assessments of female leaders are often influenced by gender stereotypes rather than competence itself. Thus, the evaluation of leadership operates as a communicative arena that is not neutral but laden with gender-based power relations.

Another finding, namely the double bind dilemma, also shows that female leaders are placed in a paradoxical position. When female leaders act assertively, they are negatively labelled; however, when they act empathetically, their authority is questioned. This condition reinforces Role Congruity Theory, which explains the tension between women's gender stereotypes, which are communal, and expectations of the leadership role, which are agentic. In addition, studies by (Adamson, 2017) and (Oktaviani, 2024) also show that women in patriarchal contexts must continuously engage in identity work to maintain professional legitimacy. From the perspective of feminist organizational communication, this dilemma indicates that women's leadership is not merely a matter of individual capacity, but rather the result of structures of meaning that constrain the expression of women's authority within organizations.

Another finding, namely hegemonic masculinity in organizational structures and practices, reveals that barriers to women's leadership are not only interpersonal but are also embedded within organizational structures. Bias in the distribution of information, communication preferences directed toward male leaders, and the lack of organizational policy support indicate the continuity of hegemonic masculinity in organizational structures and practices within everyday work activities. This finding is consistent with Acker (1990) argument regarding how organizational structures, policies, and cultures systematically reproduce gender inequality. (Rahman, 2025) study in the context of the transportation and logistics sector also shows that the lack of structural support narrows women's room for mobility in strategic positions. Thus, female leaders face multilayered barriers originating from organizational structures, culture, and communication practices.

Thus, the findings of this study indicate that the construction of women's leadership at PT XPS LINK is not singular and is continuously negotiated through everyday communication practices. On the one hand, women's leadership presents a more relational, structured, and reflective communication approach. On the other hand, this approach reinforces mechanisms of symbolic control, increases the burden of legitimacy, and produces uncertainty in the professional identity of female leaders. The scholarly contribution of this study lies in strengthening critical and feminist perspectives in organizational communication, which affirm that leadership is a discursive arena in which meaning, power, and gender identity are continuously negotiated, rather than merely a structural function or a personal attribute.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER STUDY

This study concludes that women's leadership at PT XPS-LINK is constructed through communication practices laden with power relations and gender bias. Although female leaders structurally possess formal authority, their legitimacy is continuously negotiated through stigmatization, evaluative bias, and the double bind dilemma, which places them in contradictory positions. These findings also show that the barriers faced by female leaders are not merely personal but are embedded in masculine organizational structures and culture. This means that women's leadership in the delivery service industry constitutes a discursive arena that reveals the tension between formal recognition and symbolic constraints in everyday communication practices.

Future researchers are advised to expand the scope of studies to organizations with different industrial characteristics to compare the construction of women's leadership across diverse cultural and structural contexts. A long-term approach may be used to examine how the negotiation of female leadership legitimacy develops over an extended period. Practically, organizations are encouraged to reconsider communication practices that may reproduce gender bias and to develop policies and work cultures that are more inclusive of women's leadership. Such efforts are important for creating an organizational environment that not only recognizes

authority structurally but also provides equal symbolic legitimacy in everyday communication practices.

ETHICAL DISCLOSURE

All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation. They were informed about the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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