

ABSTRACT

Corporate Turnaround and Gender in Trinidad:
Exclusionary Practices in Corporate Turnaround Leadership

Camille Michelle Samuel

This dissertation examines the view that a masculine typology of corporate turnaround leadership, which is aggressive, dogmatic and non-emotional obtains and informs society's appreciation of women's contribution to turnaround leadership (Slatter et al. 2006; Du Toit 2006). This hierarchical task-driven model of leadership cannot be sustained as many firms today utilise highly educated and mobile workers. Undoubtedly, some stereotypically feminine nurturing styles are surreptitiously employed successfully by men. Substantively, this study finds that entrenched negative gender schemas are attached to female executive bodies which in turn exclude many women as valued turnaround leaders. This exclusion persists even as these female bodies and the associated concept of the executive woman are perceived as extremely technically competent. Executive women provide great technical support to corporate men, yet are defined against schemas which primarily construe them as confusion-making and home-bound. To explore this contradiction I draw on conceptualisations of the body as having an *excess* outside of discourse (Butler 1993; Grosz 1994).

Ultimately, this study finds that executive women and most females are not viewed as credible leaders thus leaving the task of firm revival to a socially-privileged few. This bias is problematic for small open economies as firm survival and a country's economic health rest firmly within the control of a socially-elite minority group of men. Change in this status quo is unlikely as both the men and women of the corporation currently perceive corporate women as unsuitable for turnaround leadership.

Research on the effects of the social relations of gender in this field is critical if we are to fully appreciate all elements which can support or detract from successful leadership within turbulent environments. This thesis takes such concerns into consideration as it explores the misogynous underpinnings of turnaround leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Based on thirty-three semi-structured interviews with key corporate turnaround executives and key external stakeholders, this thesis offers an explanation for the significant absence of women as turnaround leaders. Patterns of exclusions are traced against the backdrop of the turnaround process. This turnaround process is located within an understanding of the cultural and social business context in Trinidad and Tobago.

Keywords: Corporate Turnaround; Firm Decline; Corporate Renewal; Leadership Characteristics; Leadership Behaviour; Gendered Leadership; Corporate Misogyny; Androgyny; Corporate Masculinities; Women in Leadership; Gendered Economic Behaviour.