



Book Review

Management Learning

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Iga Maria Lehman, *Charismatic Leadership in Organizations: A Critique of Texts*, Routledge: New York, 2024. 129 pp.: 978-1-032-62058-9 (hbk), £140

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In recent years, opposition to scientific norms of academic writing has grown, with *Management Learning* at the forefront of efforts to recognise and encourage alternative forms of academic writing (Weatherall and Bridgman, 2025). Having served on the editorial team of *Management Learning* for eight years, including five as Co-Editor-in-Chief, first with Emma Bell and then Martyna Śliwa, I have taken satisfaction in fostering this in the journal, a highlight being the *Writing Differently* Special Issue in 2019.

I was eager, therefore, to dive into Iga Maria Lehman's new book 'Charismatic Leadership in Organizations'. Lehman is a Polish academic in the management department at WSB University in Dąbrowa Górnicza, and Editor-in-Chief of *Discourses on Culture*. Her research interests are at the intersection of applied linguistics, management communication and organisation studies. It is not obvious from the title that this is a book about writing differently. Charismatic leadership is closely associated with transformational leadership, which I and other critical management scholars are sceptical about because of a tendency to encourage cultish organisations with power concentrated at the top (Eaton et al., 2024; Tourish, 2013).

Lehman has a far more optimistic take on charismatic leaders, seeing them as skilled at developing relationships, with the ability to inspire others and lead them in positive change. While the focus of charismatic leadership has traditionally been on the use of oratory as a source of influence, Lehman applies it to writing of texts. She conceives of the production of texts as an act of leadership, with writers engaging in dialogic communication with readers to construct meaning. Her aim is to explore how scholarly writers can 'create a charismatic presence in our texts through establishing a relationship with our readers based on reflexive writing practices' (p. x).

The book is divided into five chapters. There is a preface written by leadership and discourse scholar Gail Fairhurst, but no introduction from Lehman herself, which would have been valuable to provide an overview of the book and an explanation of how the chapters connect with each other.

Chapter 1 is a theorisation of language and leadership, grounded in social constructionist perspectives on language use, which see language as a means by which social actors create realities and identities. Social-semiotic perspectives, dispositionalist approaches and positioning theory are presented, followed by a conceptualisation of leadership as manifested in discourse.

With the conceptual foundation laid, Chapter 2 examines the conventions of academic writing in management and organisation studies. Lehman is critical of writing conventions in highly ranked, mainstream academic journals, which in the prevailing 'publish or perish' research environment places pressure on writers from other disciplinary communities to suppress their linguistic

styles and conform to get published. This conformity is perpetuated by the gatekeepers of academic publishing, namely journal editors and reviewers.

While Lehman's target in this part of the book is editors and reviewers of mainstream journals, on reflection it quite accurately described aspects my editorial role at *Management Learning*. When papers came across my desk that were not written in a critical, reflexive style they were rejected, irrespective of the quality of the work. As an editorial team, we tried to create new spaces for different varieties of critical, reflexive scholarship, but we were still gatekeepers and certainly conservative in the sense of requiring submitters to conform to the journal's distinctive style and positioning.

Further critical reflection from me was prompted by Lehman's discussion of the dominance of Anglo-American writing conventions in academic journals. Lehman finds herself positioned with Polish literary, biographical and cultural characteristics on one side, and Anglophone academic writing conventions on the other side. To be published in English language journals, she had has to suppress rhetorical characteristics of Polish scholarly writing and construct an Anglophone authorial voice.

For example, there are disciplinary and cultural differences in the evaluation of digressions in writing. Within scientific writing digressions are frowned upon, being seen as an irrelevant departure from the central purpose of the text, that might impede readers' understanding. While English scholarly writing seeks to avoid digressions, it is an important feature in the German scholarly tradition, which has extended to other languages, including Polish. So, English writing convention prefers appendices and endnotes to help develop a linear argumentation, whereas in the German tradition, footnotes are given more prominence by being included in the main body of the text.

Lehman concludes that the enforcing of disciplinary and cultural norms by community gatekeepers such as journal editors creates 'linguistic inequality in academia' (p. 26), which results in the marginalisation and exclusion of non-Anglophone scholars from scholarly communities. However, despite the pressures to conform, Lehman is optimistic about the possibility of change, believing it is possible to exercise agency and create linguistic change in academic communities.

Chapter 3 of the book presents Lehman's conception of charismatic leadership in scholarly writing, which is grounded in Max Weber's work on charisma. Charismatic leaders are engaging, authentic and able to positively influence followers. Lehman notes that American leadership scholars picked up on charisma in developing their theory of transformational leadership, with transformational leaders characterised as strong, individualistic and masculine. However, in other cultural contexts, charismatic leadership can be enacted very differently. What is important, she says, is that charismatic leaders in scholarly writing consider the cultural context, be trustworthy and authentic, and be sensitive to the needs of diverse audiences.

Chapter 4 provides specific rhetorical resources to develop charismatic writing. Lehman outlines a range of techniques for engaging in dialogue with readers, including the use of metaphors, stories and personal accounts, as well as voice, the ancient construct of *pistis* and the contemporary notion of metadiscourse. *Pistis* originates with Aristotle and is the idea that authors should be confident and knowledgeable but sensitive to the needs of readers. Metadiscourse is a commentary on the text produced during the writing and considers the readers' likely background knowledge, their possible expectations, needs and objections.

The final chapter of the book presents an empirical study involving 130 participants from Anglophone and non-Anglophone universities, ranging from graduate students through to full professors. The research investigated variables that influenced participants' perception of voice and assessed participants' views of various rhetorical strategies that helped and hindered the creation of engaging and convincing writing. Participants were presented with selected textual excerpts

from management and organisation studies journals to assess their views on various technical aspects of the writing, such as jargon, metaphor and personal accounts.

Among the participants were critical management scholars. Critical management studies (CMS) occupies an interesting position in debates about writing differently. As noted earlier, critical journals such as *Management Learning* have led the critique of scientific writing and provided a refuge for those who want to write differently. However, CMS has also been accused of bad writing of its own. Chris Grey, a former editor of this journal, and Amanda Sinclair argued in their 2006 article 'Writing differently' published in *Organization* that critical management scholarship 'is too often pretentious, obscurantist and dull' (Grey and Sinclair, 2006: 445) and meaningless to anyone outside CMS.

Lehman notes that participants in her study affiliated with CMS 'were by far the most appreciative of the use of jargon' (p. 97). She concludes that while CMS has provided a valuable critique of scientific writing, 'in reality many editors and reviewers of CMS journals remain conservative in their views on how management and organization issues should be written about' (p. 99). Lehman recounts a conversation she had with two CMS scholars at an Academy of Management conference, one a journal editor and the other a reviewer. The reviewer was not a native speaker of English but was a staunch defender of the status quo. Lehman attributes this to 'the fact that non-Anglophone scholars spend years mastering the writing conventions established by mainstream journals in their fields, and therefore, many are, understandably reluctant to relinquish or challenge the dominant notions of what constitutes a well-written academic text' (p. 99).

Charismatic Leadership in Organizations makes an important contribution to discussions about the nature of scholarly writing. It provides a valuable diagnosis of the problems with dominant writing norms and an optimistic view on the potential for positive change. It provides a detailed theorisation of charismatic writing as well as providing practical guidance for those wanting to develop their scholarly writing. It is a book that will interest and inform the critical management scholarly community and readers of *Management Learning*. Lehman's critique of the Anglophone dominance of scholarly writing prompted me to reflect critically on my editorial role at this journal. *Management Learning* has done much to foster a community of scholars who write differently, but there is still much more to be done.

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