The Feminine in Management Consulting
Power, Emotion and Values in Consulting Interactions
Sheila Marsh
Contents

List of Tables and Figures  
xii

Acknowledgements  

Introduction  
1
Starting points  
2
The unfolding 'feminine'  
3
'Critical consulting' practice?  
5
What am I aiming to achieve?  
6
The shape of the book  
6

Part I Consulting: Exploring the Terrain  

Chapter 1 Studying Consulting from the Inside:  
What Do I Mean by Consulting and How Did I Research It?  

Introduction  
13
Defining consulting?  
13
The context of my consulting work  
14
The dimensions of small-scale consulting  
15
The public and not-for-profit sector context  
16
Working in a network  
17
The consulting work I studied  
18
How I approached the research  
21
Researching processes  
22
'Insider' research  
24
Reflexivity  
25
Researching women  
26

Chapter 2 Consultants, Confidantes and Consorts:  
A Genealogy of Consulting and Advice-Giving to Organisational Leaders  

Introduction  
29
Developing a 'genealogical' review  
31
Tackling a genealogical review  
33.
Advice-giving in the ancient world  
33
Mencius  
35
Plato  
35
Zeno  
39
Contents

Early centuries in Europe 40
The Renaissance 42
  Niccolò Machiavelli: 'profiting from the experiences of others' 43
  John Husee: 'I do write your ladyship my mind ...' 46
  Fools and jesters 49
Towards the modern: 17th and 18th centuries 50
Women's roles: from confidantes and consorts to consultants 51
  Early figures 52
  Confidantes and consorts: 'I plainly tell you ...' 52
  Salonnières 60
  Early women management consultants 62
Conclusions 64

Chapter 3 Images of Consulting: What Currently Shapes 68
How We See Consulting and How It Works?
Introduction 68
Consulting as an economic transaction 71
Consulting as a service 72
  Ambiguities or 'achievement'? 76
The 'advice industry' 78
  Trust 79
  Interaction and exchange 81
  Partnership 85
The 'knowledge industry' 86
  Consultant knowledge in action 88
  The knowledge intensive firm or worker 89
  Knowledge and uncertainty 91
  Insecurity and marginal role 93
Consulting as a profession? 95
Consulting as performance and rhetoric 97
  Performance 97
  Peddling pejoratives 100
  Change, symbolism and rhetoric 102
Women in consulting 105
Conclusions 107

Chapter 4 Consulting as a Discursive Practice 111
Introduction 111
Learning from the genealogy: 'feminine' discourses of 111
  advice-giving
Discourses of consulting from contemporary ('masculine') 113
  images
## Part II  Discourse Analysis of Consulting Interactions

### Chapter 5  Researching Consulting Interactions: From Process Ontology to Critical Discourse Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A process based approach</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying discourse and discursive practices</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse analysis as methodology</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying CDA</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has CDA been used?</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My use of Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The unfolding research process</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with my autoethnographic material</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense-making and presenting the material</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and ethics</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 6  Women Consultants in Action: Critical Discourse Analysis of 'Live' Consulting Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The National Policy work</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excerpt 1 'The Department has commissioned you ...'</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The One-to-One work</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excerpt 2 'I feel exasperated ...'</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Strategic Health Authority work</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excerpt 3 '... a bit of a polemic with some practical proposals ... would make it all worth while ...'</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Local Authority work</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excerpt 4 'Definitely that is not what you want ...'</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University work</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excerpt 5 'I wouldn't have the patience ... it would get on my bloody nerves ...'</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Voluntary Sector work</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Excerpt 6 ‘It would be useful to have your ideas about what is acceptable …’ 182
Excerpt 7 ‘They are stuck in a mindset …’ 184
Reviewing the discourse analysis 187

Chapter 7 Consultants Reflecting on their Work: Critical Discourse Analysis of Reflective Material

Introduction 190
Reflective stories from my colleagues 191
Excerpt 1 ‘Desperate’ cry for help 192
Excerpt 2 ‘Not just what you get paid for’ 193
Excerpt 3 ‘I can hardly function in the real world’ 194
Excerpt 4 Stories of ‘betrayal’ 195
Stories from other women consultants 199
Excerpt 5 Balancing ethics and ‘the taxi-meter’ 199
Excerpt 6 ‘I held the line’ 201
Excerpt 7 ‘Heart-sink’ work 203
My own talk about consulting 204
Excerpt 8 Where is the client? 204
Excerpt 9 Not just ‘a pair of hands’? 207
Excerpt 10 ‘How does she know we are going to be any good?’ 209
Excerpt 11 ‘What really it takes to do the work’ 212
Men’s voices 214
Excerpt 12 Avoiding ‘a pig’s ear’ 214
Excerpt 13 Throwing work ‘over your shoulder’ 216
Learning from the CDA process 220

Part III Making Sense 225

Chapter 8 What is Going On in Consulting Interactions?: Exploring Meta-themes of Power, Emotion and Values

Introduction 227
Power in the interactions and stories 228
Emotion in the interactions and stories 233
Values in the commercial process 237
Interwoven themes with gendered dimensions 242

Chapter 9 Femininities and Consulting: (Re-)animating a ‘Feminine’ Discourse of Consulting

Introduction 246
Locating the ‘feminine’ 247
The hierarchic binary of Other 248
Normative masculinities 249
Identity/ies and the ‘feminine’ 251
## Contents

| The 'feminine' in my study                                      | 253 |
| Summarising the story so far ...                               | 254 |
| Power: professional subordination of the 'feminine'            | 256 |
| Power and emotion: re-defining power through ‘relational practice’ | 259 |
| Power, emotion and values in the commercial process:          | 265 |
| how women do business                                         |     |
| A ‘feminine’ discourse of consulting                          | 269 |
| Privileging processes                                         | 269 |
| Privileging social purposes                                   | 271 |
| Embracing emotion                                             | 272 |
| Conclusion                                                    | 273 |

### Chapter 10  Toward a 'Critical Consulting' Practice:  276

**The Contribution of a 'Feminine' Discourse of Consulting**

| Introduction                                   | 276 |
| Where has my work taken us?                    | 276 |
| Power, emotion and values                      | 277 |
| Consulting as a discursive practice            | 278 |
| The ‘feminine’ in management consulting        | 280 |
| What can we learn from a ‘feminine’ discourse of consulting? | 281 |
| Developing a ‘critical consulting’ practice    | 283 |
| In critical mood ...                           | 286 |
| Final words ...                                | 288 |

**Notes**  289

**References**  296

**Index**  313