

An Analysis of Leadership Language: Political and Business Leader Sentiment: The Impact on Performance, Productivity and Wellbeing

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Abstract

This paper analyses leadership communications using the Harvard General Inquirer (HGI) sentiment analysis. Drawing on forty years of behavioural science and organisational research, I develop the hypothesis that the communicative environment created by leaders, both political and business, impacts the cognitive function, emotional regulation, productivity and wellbeing of every person exposed to it. I apply HGI analysis to the formal communications of nine world political leaders and nine major business leaders over a four-week period (5 March to 2 April 2026), providing the first direct cross-domain comparison of leadership sentiment at scale. I compare both cohorts to a baseline: the COP21 Paris Agreement (December 2015) for political leaders, and the World Economic Forum annual meeting at Davos (December 2015) for business leaders. The results reveal striking similarities: political leaders in 2026 are communicating at historically high negative sentiment levels (mean 30.9% negative), while a significant group of technology business leaders is communicating at historically positive levels (mean for tech cohort: 18%). A group of business leaders in manufacturing, financial services and luxury sectors has a medium range shaped by macroeconomic and geopolitical challenges. The analysis confirms a complex communication landscape: People are exposed to some of the most challenging political language since the Cold War and some of the most optimistic business language in recent years. I discuss the implications of this for organisational and individual resilience and performance, and the design of leadership development programmes.

Keywords: Emotional contagion; Harvard General Inquirer; Leadership communication; Organisational performance; Sentiment analysis