

# TROUBLING IRELAND

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**The politics of bullshit:  
language and neoliberalism**

Notes for a talk

by Marnie Holborow

## **The politics of bullshit: language and neoliberalism**

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The workplace is where this language is the most spouted:

Resources a bullshit keyword here:

We must look at how we can use present resources .....more resourcefully

(Resource questions = euphemisms for cutbacks)

People, of course, have now become resources :

Human resources ----

A most cynical example of use of this language was seen around the whole "Gathering" fiasco –

Leo Varadkar, that Thatcherite and great going forward man, spoke of the great natural resource which is Ireland's diaspora – a resource which offers real hope and opportunity for the image of Ireland abroad as a place to do and establish business

i.e. Irish emigrants were seen as a resource, a source of money, people to be 'shaken down' for money.–

( shame Leo Varadkar and this government did not value more highly the resource of our people when they were here, before they left our shores)

Use of Action-packed, 'impact'- effect language - bullshit reaches a crescendo

In the many management documents – missions, strategic plans, etc. - to employees that this PR language is the most absurd: - hectic, breathless, action packed merry go round, power of individuals to act, impact, and self-transform limitlessly

Research had to have "excellence with impact", said Prof Mark Ferguson, director general of SFI launch of AGENDA 2020 ( impact usually means money making impact)

Managers tell us no end to the action-orientated strategies we need to use:

We must craft a response, strategise around outcomes, and incentivize results, realize personal initiatives, multitask and be proactive, action our plan, action our action plan

We are told that people with a 'can do' attitude are the best

People who are able to leverage their talents on the strategic staircase, retool their skills and retask their practices

Employees or colleagues must share best practice, international best practice, (sorry) global best practice, they must at all times give 110% of their best

We have to learn to get ideas from the page to reality, actionise (...!) a personal development programme, task yourself and pretty much everything you do at work and certainly had better not let the grass grow under your feet

Cringe- making metaphors

We must brainstorm, have ideas storms and showers, freewheel ideas, cascade our ideas via email, touch base about that off line, loop back later, bring things to the table

Practice blue sky thinking, 360 degrees thinking, thinking out of the box, also thinking inside the box

Not just management but like in everything else - trade unions have become the most craven followers of this language use : various social partnership agreements really promote this type of language:

Official Trade Union movement excels at the use of action language

Action plans proliferating in public sector under Croke Park:

efficiency or flexibility measures will need to be progressed and embedded, measured, verified, benchmarked and a load of other ridiculous things

Problems aren't problems any more they are challenges which usually have to be faced, embraced, taken on – a process which usually involves giving up some long standing right that workers have had

There is not a speech that Jack O'Connor makes that isn't about challenges – the challenging times in which we live challenges to the union, the members, to what we hold dear, to our economy, – as soon as he says it you know he is going to move on to asking his members to swallow something – reduction of staff, greater flexibility, outsourcing whatever

So this is Bullshit language in the public domain

On one level not many people take it seriously

At another it says something about what's happening in official speak