# A Nudge for Gender Equality in Responses to Leadership: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment

Jamie Lee Gloor
jamie.gloor@gmail.com

Manuela C. Morf

Urschi Backes-Gellner

Prototypicality can be benchmarked according to the leader (i.e., attributes that characterize "leaders") or the group (i.e., attributes that characterize the follower group), and is a key determinant of leadership effectiveness. However, these benchmarking processes are often biased in favor of men and we've a persistent lack of women leaders. Thus, we conduct a multi-level, randomized field experiment to test if gender-related group prototypes can trump gender-related leader prototypes. Using 460 followers nested in 35 teams, we manipulated leaders' group prototypicality via group gender demography with male majority (20% women) or gender-balanced (50% women) teams. Leaders were trained for 2 days and spent 6 hours with their teams, after which we examined followers' ratings of leader prototypicality. As expected, leader gender predicts leader prototypicality in male majority teams, despite no differences in leaders' self-reported prototypicality. Importantly, this male advantage in perceptions of leaders was eliminated in gender-balanced teams. Our findings support the social identity model of organizational leadership and indicate a boundary condition of role congruity theory. This evidence bolsters our need for a more social relational, context-based approach to leadership, and moves beyond gap research to empirically test a theoretically-derived solution. Our findings promote team construction as a method to "fix the game" for gender equality in responses to leadership without cost, training, or backlash towards women leaders.