Leadership Excellence and Gender in Organizations

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

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgg

Part of the Communication Commons, Human Resources Management Commons, Organizational Behavior and Theory Commons, Political Science Commons, Psychology Commons, and the Sociology Commons

Recommended Citation

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
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.