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## Women's leadership identity emergence

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## **Abstract**

The dearth of women emerging into leadership positions, across sectors and industries persists, despite a myriad of initiatives, generally driven by Human Resources. Leader emergence is a complex adaptive process. A leadership identity needs to be both internalised and recognised by others, involving individual, relational and social processes that enable not only the leader to 'claim' her/himself as a leader, but for others to 'grant' her/him in that role (DeRue and Ashford, 2010). If leader roles are socially constructed, then the social context matters, both to the identity development and effectiveness of the leader. In male-dominated industries, such as professional service firms (PSFs), gendered institutional biases will impact the 'claim and grant' identity work of atypical potential women leaders. Careers, particularly in PSFs, are often depicted in literature as individualistic processes, aimed at individual mastery and differentiation from others. Yet research shows us that career progression in PSFs is absolutely a relational process, relying on influencing the good will of others. Networks and relationships are key. We ask what is the role of the mentor-mentee relationship in the claiming and granting of atypical leadership identities?