



# Paradoxical Leadership: Navigating Gender, Power & Change

Prof. Dr. Julia Nentwich  
Prof. Dr. Harald Tuckermann  
Nadine Steingruber

LEADERS  
FOR  
EQUALITY

## Theoretical Background and Research Gap:

Leadership is paradoxically entangled with gender and power. However, this is rarely addressed by leadership research.

Examining how leaders navigate the paradox of heroic and post-heroic leadership, this study addresses this gap.



## Key Takeaways:



**Leadership in Transition:** Traditional heroic leadership remains dominant, even though post-heroic leadership is seen as the future.



**Male Dominance:** Heroic leadership is often associated with masculinity, while post-heroic leadership is viewed as "feminine."



**Challenge for Equality:** Despite efforts to promote gender equality, power distribution remains asymmetric.



**Paradoxical Responses:** Leaders apply different strategies to navigate tensions of heroic and post-heroic leadership:

- **Ignorance & obedience:** Stabilize the status quo.
- **Assimilation:** Integrate post-heroic elements into heroic structures without real change.
- **Dissimilation:** Implement gradual changes that enable long-term transformation.

## Qualitative Research Design:

- 15 group discussions with 101 leaders in Switzerland
- discourse psychological analysis
- RQ: "how do leaders navigate the tensions between heroic and post-heroic leadership?"

## Findings:



Leaders reinforce the dominant heroic leadership model through responses that either ignore, neglect or accept power dynamics.



Although post-heroic leadership is often cited as a solution, it is frequently assimilated into heroic structures rather than replacing them.



Some leaders engage in "dissimulation," implementing small, localized changes to challenge heroic leadership without direct confrontation.

## Key Insight:

Only by recognizing the dominance of heroic leadership can post-heroic leadership become a true alternative.

Leaders must actively engage in dismantling entrenched power structures while fostering inclusive and transformational leadership models.

Learn more  
about Leaders  
for Equality!

