

**Why do heroic leadership and gender inequality persist?
A paradox lens on change towards post-heroic leadership
and gender equality**

EGOS 2023, Cagliari

Sub-theme 42: Imagined Futures for Gender, Diversity, and
Intersectionality:

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Leaders for Equality: The Study

Aim

Supporting companies involving male managers in gender equality activities

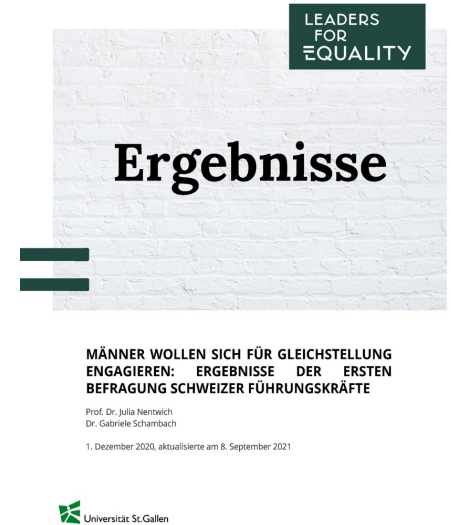
5 project companies

retail, transport, insurance, electrical equipment, medical technology

Quantitative study (motivation, barriers, inclusive leadership practices, climate for inclusion)

1190 male and female leaders in Switzerland

Qualitative study group discussions: total of 100 leaders, 10 discussion groups with men, 5 with women



Paradigm shift?

- Heroic leadership as old-fashioned and masculine (Fletcher, 2004);
 - Post-heroic leadership enabling female leadership;
 - and developing gender equality beyond the glass ceiling (Zheng et al. 2018).
 - Paradigm shift (Fletcher, 2004), challenging (Wahl, 2014) or disruption (Knights & Kerfoot, 2004) of male norm needed.
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- Paradox lense: “from heroic to post-heroic” in an “either-or” logic



Paradox lens: both-and

- Heroic and post-heroic as paradox: interdependent but contradictory (Smith & Lewis, 2011)
- Finding both-and ways necessary and not forcing to choose one over the other (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016; Schad, Lewis, Raisch, & Smith, 2016)
- Taking power into account: heroic leadership is dominating post-heroic (Khan et al., 2022).

Transforming leadership hence involves

- To make explicit what is taken for granted in leaders' own practice
- In a context that is impregnated by heroic leadership (peers, structures, reward systems...)

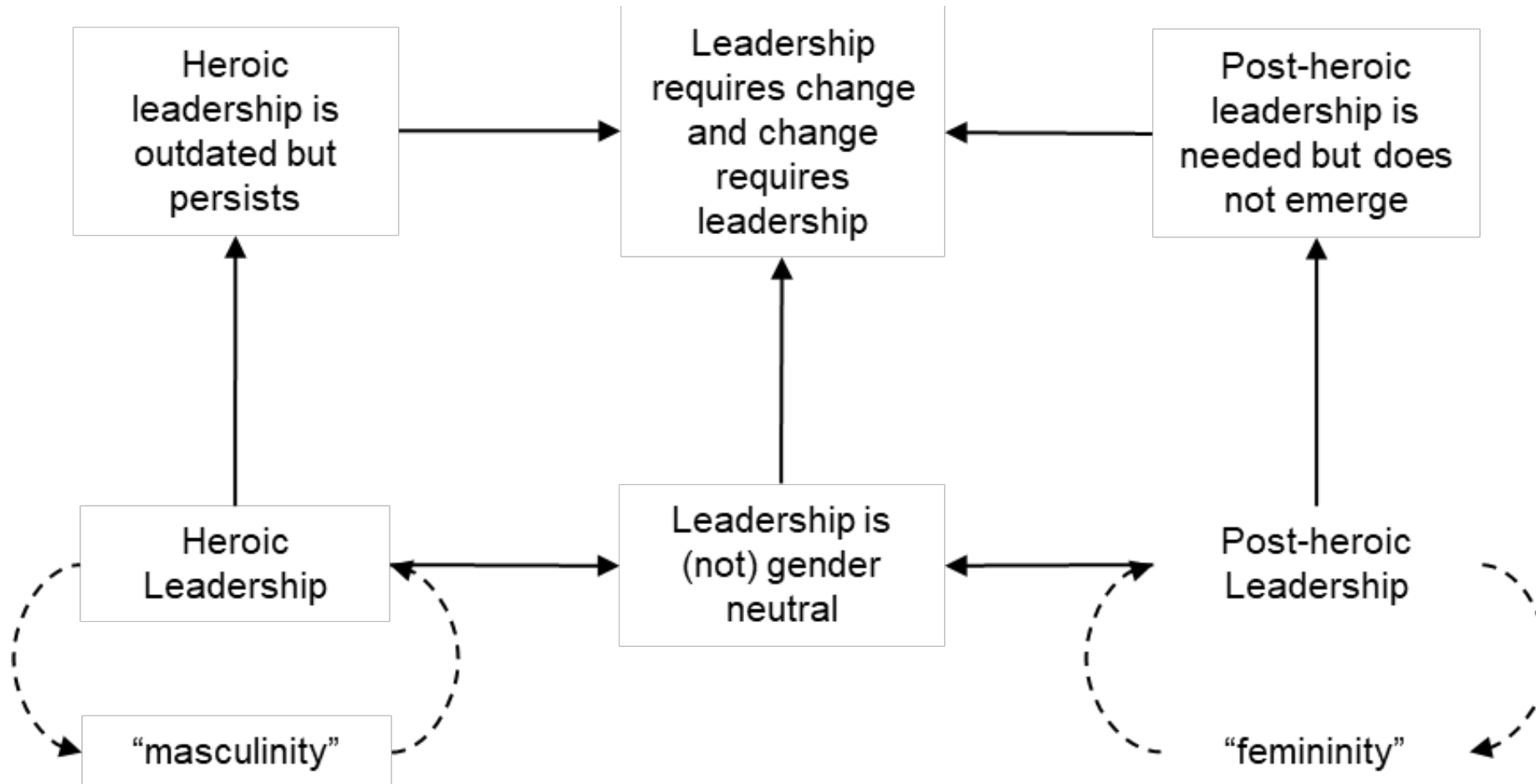
How are leaders approaching these tensions?

Three Tensions

1. **Change tension: Heroic leadership as old-fashioned but still powerful**
 - ‘Definitely slowly dying out’: Heroic leadership as outdated
 - ‘Are you going home at 6pm?’ Culture of presence as a debated necessity
2. **Gender tension: Heroic leadership as masculine yet gender neutral**
 - ‘A law of nature’: Men have everything you need for a top management position
 - ‘Leadership is not about gender, it is about actually living for the job’: How gender is hidden behind seemingly neutral ideas of leadership
3. **Agency tension: New leadership as necessity, yet we need to do something about it**
 - ‘Leadership is changing because times are changing’: New leadership is not about gender equality
 - ‘Just do it!’: Change will only happen if we as leaders are taking charge
4. **From “either-or” to “both-and”? Actively changing leadership and taking gender into account**

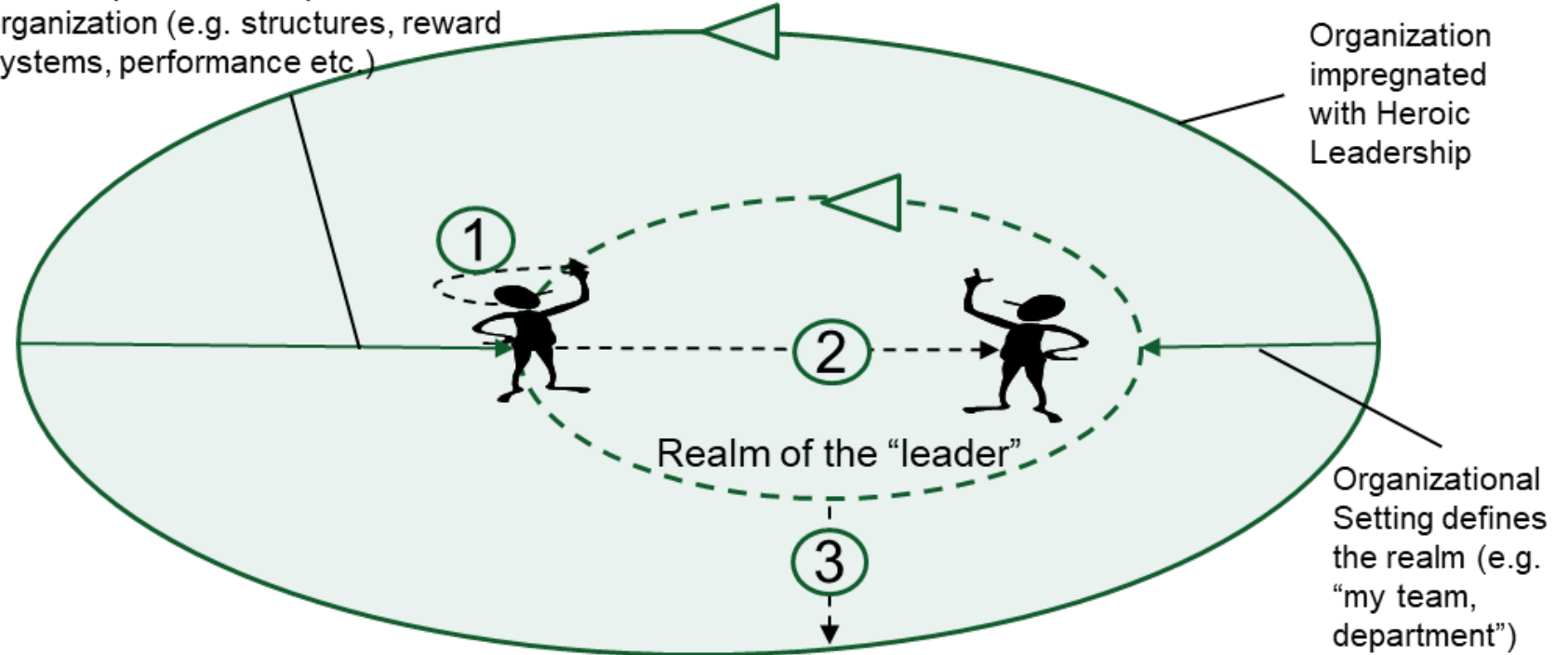


(Post-)Heroic leadership as paradox



Three moves of addressing the paradox

“Leader” socialized by heroic leadership with own taken-for-granted and subject to heroic expectations of peers and organization (e.g. structures, reward systems, performance etc.)



- ① **Self-reflecting** of own role and setting (e.g. questioning privileged position; on the tensions of heroic and post-heroic leadership)
- ② **Experimenting** with alternative leadership (e.g. highlighting different rewards, like social skills; allowing for part-time leadership, awareness for application behavior of men and women within the realm...)
- ③ **Expanding** the boundaries of the alternative leadership (e.g. by promoting women of the realm to other positions...)



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Company	Discussions and participants
Transport	2 discussions with male leaders (8 and 6 men) 1 discussion with female leaders (5 women)
Retail	1 discussion with male leaders (7 men) 1 discussion with female leaders (7 women)
Medical engineering	2 discussions with male leaders (9 and 8 men) 1 discussion with female leaders (5 women)
Insurance	2 discussions with male leaders (6 and 6 men) 1 discussion with female leaders (5 women)
Electrical engineering	3 discussions with male leaders (13, 5 and 4 men) 1 discussion with female leaders (6 women)
Total	10 discussions with male leaders (72 men) 5 discussions with female leaders (28 women)

