

**The Roles of Leader Gender and Organisational Diversity  
Climate in the Feedback Context:  
An Experimental Test of an Integrated Model.**

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## Executive Summary

*Objectives.* Female leaders are still exposed to subtle and overt barriers in organisations. Eagly and Kaurau's (2002) well-researched *Role Congruity Theory* suggests that communion-related female gender roles interfere with the rather agency-related stereotypes associated with leaders. This disparity renders prejudices and discrimination against female managers. As women constitute an ever-growing cohort in management, organisations are required to manage diversity in ways that diminish discrimination, whilst unleashing the potential of female leadership. Auspicious findings on Diversity Climate – as employee perceptions of how much their organisation values and fosters diversity (cf. Cox, 1994) – corroborate that organisational systems and culture moderate the impact of diversity on individuals and groups. However, no study has applied Diversity Climate to the context of leadership. This study reviewed and integrated past theory and research on female leadership and organisational Diversity Climate (ODC). Subsequently, the model components were tested experimentally.

*Methodology.* The sample comprised 146 employees of different companies in the EU and North America. Subjects participated in a 15 minutes online experiment, which was formed of two parts. In the first, experimental part, participants were randomly assigned to either a female ( $n = 68$ ) or a male ( $n = 78$ ) leader condition. Participants were presented with an organisational scenario in which they identified with the role of a customer advisor in a furniture shop, who would receive a feedback by their new store manager (Julia/Simon). The feedback consisted of a three-minute audio record that was spoken by a female or male voice, respectively. Subsequently, participants were asked to rate the leaders on perceived leader competence, feedback constructiveness, and intentions to act upon the feedback. In the second part, participants evaluated their own companies' ODC, and provided information on control variables.

*Results.* Multiple linear regressions (MLRs) revealed that leader competence and ODC both significantly predict feedback intentions. Independent t-tests yielded no differences between female and male leaders in any of the three dependent variables. Instead, a cross-sex favouritism emerged with regard to leader competence and feedback intentions. As indicated by ANCOVAs, ODC did not alter these cross-sex biases. However, subsample MLRs with intentions as the outcome variable provided preliminary evidence that ODC was more important in the female leader condition.

*Implications.* This study provides new evidence for the predictive validity of ODC, and updates the status quo of female leader stereotyping. Organisations are strongly recommended to pursue a wholesome strategy to foster a pro-diversity culture in general, and manage gender diversity particularly in leadership. This is particularly important in the light of a compelling business case for gender-diverse management, and evidence that women lead more transformationally (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003).

*Originality.* Three important shortcomings of former research were addressed in this study. First, the experiment was set in the highly relevant context of feedback-giving. Thus, it allowed first conclusions on follower behaviour. Second, the conceptual integration accomplished two aims: not only did it overcome the limitations of the cross-sectional designs ODC has typically been studied in; it also filled a gap in the female leadership literature, where there is a notable shortage of empirical research on culture-related predictors of female leaders' success.

## Introduction

Organisations nowadays face the challenges of a globalised and diverse workforce. Due to its saliency, gender diversity is a predominant concern. Thus, researchers, practitioners, and politicians alike have led a fierce debate around gender inequality and discrimination against women at work (e.g. Catalyst, 2014; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2015; Kumra, Simpson, & Burke, 2014). Discrimination – defined as the differential treatment of individuals due to their social category (Fiske, 1998) – becomes particularly evident when women proceed into manager roles. Although women represent 46% of the workforce across large companies in the EU, they only hold an average of 11% of executive functions (European Commission, 2013). Research shows that neither differences in leader effectiveness (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995), leader performance ratings (Roth, Purvis, & Bobko, 2012) or cognitive abilities can account for these figures (Carothers & Reis, 2013; Deaux, 1984).

In the literature, the systematic lack of female managers and executives has been discussed under the term *glass ceiling* (Morrison & von Glinow, 1990), or more recently, *labyrinth* (to highlight the concept's dynamic nature; Eagly & Carli, 2007). These metaphors illustrate the subtle, often unconscious barriers women are confronted with as they climb the organisational hierarchy (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001). These barriers are a result of both individual and organisational processes (Barreto, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2009). Research suggests that contradictory stereotypes of women and managers – that is, generalised assumptions about these social categories – can powerfully drive discrimination against minorities (Fiske, 1998). However, their adverse impact within the context of female leadership varies across organisational contexts, and typically peaks in male-dominated industries (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014). Such industries are characterised

by high percentages of male staff, in conjunction with masculine cultures that perpetuate the higher power status of white, able, heterosexual men (e.g. Collinson & Hearn, 1996).

The backlashes of gender inequality are invaluable. Not only is there sound evidence for the organisational hazards of discrimination against women (Goldman, Gutek, Stein, & Lewis, 2006). Also, the “business case” for women in the board has found preliminary support (Catalyst, 2011). Moreover, women have been attested a leadership advantage as they are more likely than men to engage in highly effective transformational leadership practices (Eagly et al., 2003). Diversity researchers have affirmed that diversity can be managed such that it prevents negative, and promotes positive outcomes (Cox, 1994). Cox’ (1994) seminal framework of workplace diversity posits that top-down, organisational processes can effectively unleash diversity potential by shaping positive employee perceptions of diversity; thus generating a supportive *organisational diversity climate* (ODC). Similarly, in an adverse climate, the absence of such processes powerfully amplify discrimination by tolerating or overtly approving of inequality (Schein, 2004). Following from research around organisational moderators in female leadership, this study argues that ODC plays a crucial role for female leaders’ success.

Noteworthy, past research has mostly focused on cognitive or affective outcomes, such as perceived effectiveness or leader satisfaction (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Despite illuminating the underlying psychological processes, these studies only allow limited predictions about employees’ future behaviour. To counteract this shortcoming, the current study explicitly focuses on intentions to act upon feedback as a second outcome besides perceived leader competence. Feedback constitutes a fundamental vehicle for leaders to enhance followers’ performance through motivational and learning effects (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), and ultimately contributes to organisational goal-achievements.



Taken together, this study argues that the adverse impact of stereotyping towards female leaders in the feedback context is contingent on organisational diversity factors. Hence, the aims of this study are as follows. Firstly, the importance of feedback as a leadership tool, and the role of leaders as the feedback source will be demonstrated. Then, drawing on *Role Congruity Theory* (Eagly & Karau, 2002), the preponderance of gender stereotyping effects will be tested in an experimental feedback setting. Secondly, research regarding ODC will be reviewed, and the manifold conceptual similarities to female leadership research will be outlined. Finally, both concepts will be integrated to explore if employees' responses to female leaders differ as a function of the ODC experienced within their companies.

### **The Medium: Feedback as a Leadership Tool**

Giving meaningful feedback constitutes an essential within a leader's toolkit in an array of appraisal and developmental settings, and its power to enhance individual development and thus achievement has been reported in a wide range of studies (see Kluger & DeNisi, 1996 for a meta-analysis). Feedback can be understood as a specific form of communication in which the source conveys a message that holds information about the recipient (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). The recipient makes sense of this message as a function of *source*, *message*, and *recipient variables* along three steps: perception, acceptance, and intention-building (Ilgen et al., 1979). In turn, as intentions "capture the motivational factors that influence a behaviour" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181), they represent a necessary condition for behaviour change after feedback (cf. also London & Smither, 2002). Especially the source and message variables are embodied in, and therefore highly modifiable by the leader. Thus, these variables will be discussed in turn.

The feedback message has frequently been investigated in terms of valence; that is, if the message itself contains mainly positive or negative information on the recipient. There is a

general consensus that positive feedback is better accepted than negative messages (Ilgen et al., 1979; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). However, in corporate reality, feedback often contains both praise to motivate employees, and negative messages to uncover employees' developmental fields and increase learning. In their seminal work, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) found that in approximately one third of 607 studies (mean weighted  $d = 0.41$ ), performance decreased following the feedback intervention. The authors concluded that particularly in negative feedback, task-relatedness and reference to behavioural indicators are principal to assure positive outcomes. This is supported by research on constructive feedback, which is characterised by enhancing the recipient's awareness of current strengths and weaknesses in accordance with agreed goals, and doing so in a clear, positive, timely, and consistent manner (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004). Moreover, a cross-sectional study by Sommer and Kulkarni (2012) yielded that constructive feedback, regardless of valence, is highly positively correlated with positive job-related affect which in turn mediated desirable employee attitudes such as job satisfaction and intended citizenship behaviour.

Although Ilgen et al. (1979) concede that it is intricate to separate the feedback message from its origin, they maintain that the source incorporates critical predictors beyond the message they communicate. Ilgen et al. (1979) distinguish between source credibility and power. *Credibility* has been described as the source's competence, knowledge, and trustworthiness (e.g. Boudrias, Bernaud, & Plunier, 2014). Source credibility has been reported to have moderate to large effects on feedback acceptance and motivational intention after controlling for message-related variables (Boudrias et al., 2014; Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004). *Power* refers to the source's access to rewards and sanctions anticipated by the recipient. The linkages between gender and power will be discussed in a later section.

In the current study, high feedback constructiveness (FC) was pursued through adherence to the principles outlined by (Sommer & Kulkarni, 2012). As both experimental

conditions received the same feedback script, variance in feedback intention (FI) is assumed to occur as a function of the feedback source. Thus, perceived leader competence (LC) should significantly predict followers' intention-building after controlling for feedback constructiveness.

*Hypothesis 1: Leader competence predicts feedback intention over and above feedback constructiveness.*

### **The Source: Women as Leaders**

**Defining gender.** To approach gender discrimination in leadership, a profound understanding of gender is required – apart from the biological differentiation between the sexes. Ayman and Korabik (2010) describe gender as a multidimensional concept. Gender influences how men and women develop self-concepts, and how they interact with each other. At a societal level, gender reflects power statuses that are socially constructed and systematically upheld. This multidimensionality demands that researchers take a holistic approach to comprehend the interplay of individual and contextual gender processes (see also Burke, 2014; Hogue & Lord, 2007). This section will introduce individual level theories as a basis to understand gender phenomena in leadership. The complementary organisational processes will be discussed in the light of diversity climate later on.

**Psychological factors: Gender stereotyping.** From an individual perspective, there is substantial evidence that female leaders are perceived differently as they activate contradictory stereotypes (e.g. Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011; Schein, 2001). Stereotypes are cognitive structures that represent knowledge related to members of a social group. Often, such knowledge triggers negative expectations – so-called prejudices – which may then drive discrimination against minorities (Fiske, 1998). As a subordinate form of stereotyping, *gender roles* contain beliefs about adequate behaviours for men and women (Powell, 2011). Hence, women are traditionally ascribed the homemaker-role, whilst men are

widely depicted as ‘bread-winners’. Accordingly, men are “high in ‘masculine’ traits such as independence, aggressiveness, and dominance, and females are high in ‘feminine’ traits such as gentleness, sensitivity to the feelings of others, and tactfulness” (Powell, 2011, p. 39).

These patterns are commonly referred to as *agency* and *communion* (Powell & Butterfield, 1979).

Gender roles vitally shape expectations of women in the workplace. In her well-referenced *Lack of Fit Model*, Heilman (1983) states that stereotypes about job applicants engender discrimination if they fit poorly with the requirements of the job. Hence, women are rated unfavourably particularly in male sex-typed occupations (as indicated by a high structural presence of male job-holders). Lending support to the model, a meta-analysis of sex discrimination in employment by Davison and Burke (2000) found that male applicants are more likely to be selected for male sex-typed jobs (e.g. engineering, handicraft; mean weighted corrected  $r = .17$ ,  $k = 13$ ), whereas the opposite effect occurred for female applicants (e.g. nursery, receptionist;  $r = -.13$ ,  $k = 8$ ).

Since managerial roles have historically been a prerogative of men (Chemers, 2000), ‘manager’, too, is a male sex-typed occupation (Heilman, 1983). Building on Heilman (1983), Eagly and Karau (2002) established their *Role Congruity Theory* (RCT) to apply gender discrimination to leader roles. RCT differentiates between descriptive stereotyping (how women/leaders *really are*), and prescriptive stereotyping (how women/leaders should *ideally behave*). The perceived incongruity of female and leader roles leads to two prejudices; first, women are attributed less leadership potential. Second, female leaders are viewed to “violate their gender role”. Although the current study is concerned with prescriptive stereotyping, research on descriptive stereotyping will be outlined first as they establish the required theoretical foundation.

**Descriptive stereotyping: Less potential.** Descriptive stereotypes are concerned with characteristics typically associated with social categories. Due to the high ratio of men in management, leader stereotypes are often described in masculine terms (Koenig et al., 2011). Jumping to conclusions, men are generally expected to have higher leadership potential. This phenomenon was first evidenced by Schein's (1973, 1975) "think manager - think male" paradigm<sup>1</sup>, which remains the predominant method to conceptualise the mismatch of women and leader stereotypes. Within this method, the resemblance of stereotypes of either women or men with managers is measured, and the resulting intraclass correlation coefficients are compared.

Table 1  
*Comparison of "Think Manager, Think Male" Paradigm (ICCs of four different studies)*

Groups compared	Sample							
	Schein (1973)	Schein (1975)	Duehr & Bono (2006)				Koenig et al. (2011)	
	male managers (N = 300)	female managers (N = 167)	male managers (N = 333)	female managers (N = 287)	male students (N = 221)	female students (N = 467)	male participants	female participants
Men and managers	.62*	.54*	.61**	.49**	.40**	.45**	.63* (k = 48)	.58* (k = 49)
Women and managers	.06	.30*	.63**	.70**	.10	.35**	.11* (k = 49)	.37* (k = 47)

Note. Values indicate ICC. Koenig et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis indicates mean weighted ICC for each subgroup.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .

The 'think manager, think male' paradigm was found to be relatively stable over time and across nations (Schein, 2001). However, research suggests that its impact has declined over the decades (e.g. Duehr & Bono, 2006; Koenig et al., 2011). Typically, greater discrepancies between female and leader stereotypes occur in male and non-managerial samples (cf. Table 1). In Duehr and Bono's (2006) study, this was partly accounted for by

1 The original design (Schein, 1973) involved that male managers be assigned to three different groups: women in general, men in general, or successful middle managers (as a control condition). Subsequently, they were asked to rate how characteristic an array of traits was for their respective social group. After calculating intraclass correlation coefficients, Schein found a significantly higher resemblance between men in general and successful middle managers, than between women and managers, indicating that only men are perceived to possess attributes typical of successful middle managers (see Table 1). This finding could be replicated – if to a weaker extent – with female managers as participants Schein (1975).

positive experiences with female managers. The authors concluded from these findings that proximity to actual female managers effectively mitigates the adverse impact of stereotypes, which leads on to prescriptive stereotyping.

***Prescriptive stereotyping: Lower evaluations.*** According to RCT, by assuming a leader role, women violate communal gender role stereotypes which generates unfavourable reactions (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The more masculine the leader role, the more severe the violation is perceived to be. Masculinity can be derived from hierarchical level, management function (e.g. personnel, finance), and industry (e.g. healthcare, military). The postulates of RCT are typically supported by experimental study designs, whereas evidence from field designs is not straightforward (see Eagly et al., 1992 for a meta-analysis). Ironically, this tendency can be construed as evidence for the theory in its own right. As experiments typically use written vignettes or short audio-/video-records to describe leaders, such studies provide restricted performance-related information on the targets. As a result, hypothetical female leaders are more susceptible to adverse prescriptive stereotyping – thus corroborating the power of stereotypes.

Experimental research shows that female leaders in male-dominated occupations are liked less, and perceived to be more hostile, even if they are depicted as being successful (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; see also Rosette & Tost, 2010). Similarly, they receive harsher judgements after committing mistakes (Brescoll, Dawson, & Uhlmann, 2010). In yet another experiment, Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, and Reichard (2008) found that, although results indicated participants' preference for a strong as opposed to a sensitive leader style, strong female leaders were judged as least competent. In support of RCT, stereotyping effects have been found to disappear if female leaders were described to engage in communal activities to "compensate" for their lack of communion (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007).

Cross-sectional designs typically involve field studies with actual leaders. Contrary to Eagly et al.'s (1992) earlier findings on discrimination in experimental designs, Eagly et al. (1995) did not find a significant overall difference in perceived leader effectiveness ( $k = 6$ , mean weighted  $d = -0.03$ ,  $ns$ ) in the field. This finding was renewed by a meta-analysis by Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014), who found no overall disparity between male and female leader effectiveness across 99 studies. Moreover, Roth et al. (2012) conducted a meta-analysis on gender differences in job performance ratings which looked at managers as a subsample. Results rendered a small but significant bias in favour of female managers (corrected  $d = 0.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $k = 8$ ).

Elsesser and Lever (2011) have made an insightful attempt to integrate descriptive and prescriptive stereotyping in a field design. They found that descriptive stereotyping prevails, such indicated by a significant preference of a male as compared to a female manager in a US sample of 60,470. However, no evidence for prescriptive stereotyping was found, as employees did rate their current bosses equally with respect to competence and relationship quality, regardless of gender. In sum, these findings suggest that stereotyping is less influential when there is performance-related information on leaders available, as is rather the case in cross-sectional studies (see also Davison & Burke, 2000).

With regard to the current study, both leader competence and feedback intentions are expected to be biased in favour of the male leaders due to the experimental design. Additionally, these differences are presumed to occur despite equal ratings of feedback constructiveness.

*Hypothesis 2a:* Male and female leaders do *not* differ with respect to perceived feedback constructiveness.

*Hypothesis 2b:* Male leaders receive significantly higher ratings on leader competence.

*Hypothesis 2c:* Male leaders receive significantly higher ratings on feedback intention.

### **The Context: Organisational Diversity**

**Why managing diversity is important.** Diversity refers to the multitude of attributes by which a group can be divided, and becomes maximal when these attributes are divided equally (Blau, 1977). Importantly, *workplace diversity* does not merely refer to heterogeneity (Blau, 1977). Rather, it reflects differences in rank (status or power) orders, which is certainly the case in gender diversity (e.g. Korabik & Ayman, 2007; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989) as will be discussed in a later section.

Regarding outcomes, on the one hand, diversity is an organisational resource which ensures a multitude of complementary skills and knowledge. This potential build the premise for the so-called information decision-making paradigm (Rink & Ellemers, 2009), as task-related diversity could be shown to benefit group performance through enhanced creativity and decisions (Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999). On the other hand, sociodemographic diversity is often found to render rather negative outcomes such as intergroup-conflict and discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Goldman et al. (2006) have made a case that discrimination in employment against women and minorities negatively affects individuals, groups, and entire organisations. Consequences include ill-health and decreased performance in employees, loss of talent and reputation and additional organisational expenditures (e.g. on litigation). In practice, task-related and sociodemographic diversity are likely to coincide, which leaves workgroup performance outcomes of diversity somewhat inconsistent (Rink & Ellemers, 2009).

Drawing on Cox' (1994) *Interactional Model of the Impact of Diversity*, workplace diversity is a multilevel concept that involves individual, group, and organisational level processes (see Figure 1). Diversity outcomes are mediated by a range of processes. As discussed earlier with reference to female leaders, stereotypes are likely to foster prejudices



and differential treatment of members of certain social categories at the individual level (Fiske, 1998). Likewise, the activation of stereotypes can negatively affect actual performance in stereotype-relevant tasks, known as *stereotype threat*. A meta-analysis by Nguyen and Ryan (2008) found that women perform significantly worse on a mathematical ability test when confronted with the stereotype of women being bad at maths ( $k = 72$ , mean  $d = -0.21$ ). Discriminatory treatment, in turn, may reinforce stereotypes – for example when women are less frequently appointed to manager positions, and are therefore viewed to possess less leadership potential (Goldman et al., 2006). Discrimination can also occur at the group level. According to *social identity theory* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), individuals seek self-enhancement through self-categorisation into social groups (e.g. gender). Once a group member, individuals will attempt to positively evaluate their own, and devalue out-groups, resulting in in-group bias and intergroup-conflict (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994).

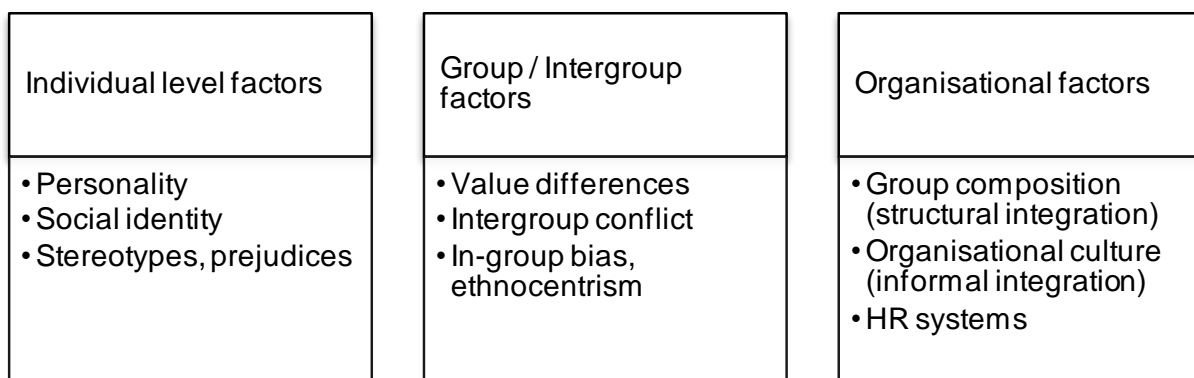


Figure 1. Cox' (1994) model of diversity (simplified presentation).

Of central importance is Cox' (1994) assertion that organisational top-down processes regulate the bottom-up, individual and group level diversity phenomena. Organisational processes incorporate structural (group composition), formal (HR systems) and informal (culture) factors. As Western organisations' workforces become ever more diverse with respect to age, gender, nationality, and ethnicity, organisations have increasingly engaged in activities to 'manage workplace diversity'. Managing workplace diversity means to

compensate for those differences that have been historically and institutionally discriminated against (Cox, 1994; Prasad, Pringle, & Konrad, 2006). As regards gender, this might entail gender-free, performance-related assessments, implementing gender quotas, or providing women networks (Herdman & McMillan-Capehart, 2010). The rationale is to prevent potential detrimental outcomes, while leveraging the competitive advantage that comes with a diverse workforce (Prasad et al., 2006).

**Diversity climate.** The *Diversity Climate* (DC) of an organisation broadly refers to employee perceptions the aforementioned diversity processes (Cox, 1994). *Organisational Diversity Climate* (ODC) particularly assesses the organisational level processes, and is defined as “employees’ shared perceptions of the policies and practices that communicate the extent to which fostering diversity and eliminating discrimination is a priority in the organization” (Pugh, Dietz, Brief, & Wiley, 2008, p. 1422). According to Cox, DC predicts manifold outcomes that are critical to the organisation’s success, such as little turnover, innovation, productivity, and profitability. These are mediated by individual *affective* and *achievement variables* (e.g. job satisfaction, commitment, and job performance). Cox’ framework has been corroborated by a growing body of evidence. In support of the organisational benefits, McKay, Avery, and Morris (2009) reported high positive correlations between ODC and sales unit performance in a large US retail organisation. Gonzalez and DeNisi (2009) were particularly interested in the interaction effects of sociodemographic variables and ODC, and found supportive ODC to lower the employee intention to quit when working in a gender or ethnic minority context. Additionally, supportive DC maximised productivity in heterogeneous groups.

On behalf of the presumed mediators, an early study by Hicks-Clarke and Iles (2000) has yielded moderate positive effects of ODC on i.a. organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and career future satisfaction in a British sample. Lending further support,

Wolfson, Kraiger, and Finkelstein (2011) found that ODC was positively associated with desirable employee attitudes, namely individual empowerment, commitment, and job satisfaction, across a total of 1,090 employees of different US companies. Due to cross-sectional research on attitudinal outcomes of DC, there is an intuitive link between DC and the intention to follow upon feedback in the current study.

*Hypothesis 3:* ODC predicts intentions to act upon leader feedback.

Interestingly, research suggests that diversity is perceived differently by men and women. Research on DC consents that women and minorities value organisational diversity more highly than white men, leading to higher individual DC scores. At the same time, their ratings of ODC are typically lower, as in their view organisations do not meet the requirements to manage diversity effectively (e.g. Kossek & Zonia, 1993; McKay et al., 2007; Mor Barak, 1998). Mor Barak (1998) concluded that, as women are more likely to face discrimination and institutional barriers, (the lack of) organisational diversity initiatives become more salient and consequential to them. This incongruity may have organisational level implications. In McKay et al.'s (2007) study, DC significantly predicted turnover intentions in women and other minorities – but not in white men.

To the author's surprise, despite the differential relevance of DC for men and women, and the far-reaching conceptual parallels between female leadership and ODC, no study to this date has examined DC in the context of gender diversity in leadership.

### **The Integration: A Diversity Approach to Female Leadership**

Research has emphasised the hindrances women are exposed to particularly in leader roles that emphasise masculinity. However, a growing body of evidence suggesting a “female leadership advantage” (Helgesen, 1995) has emerged. This advantage is built on the premise that female leaders do more frequently display a transformational leadership style (Eagly et

al., 2003), which is the most effective style as consensually agreed (see Judge & Piccolo, 2004, for a meta-analysis). By reason of a progressively complex corporate reality, the relevance of transformational leadership may even increase in the future (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Kerfoot & Knights, 1996). Moreover, a remarkable presence of practitioner debates and initiatives in the US and Europe suggests that organisations endeavour to unleash the potential of female leadership (e.g. Bain & Company, 2010; Bloxham, 2011; Bücheler, 2014; Huddleston, 2014; Opportunity Now, 2014).

This section will develop an argument as to why ODC is crucial for female leadership. This argument is rooted in past research around organisational moderators of leader gender effects. Field studies have yielded high variances in leader gender bias across different industries. This pattern indicates that adverse stereotype impact is moderated by the organisational environment in which women lead. Just as occupations, entire organisations or industries can be male-dominated (Ko, Kotrba, & Roebuck, 2015). Whereas female leaders are typically rated more favourably in female-dominated industries (social services, education), the reverse effect shows in e.g. military or government samples (cf. Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Gender workforce composition as a *structural*, and hegemonic masculinity as a *cultural* factor will be reviewed in the following, and their relevance to ODC demonstrated.

**Organisational moderators in female leadership.** Male-dominated organisations render female leaders highly salient (Ko et al., 2015). This structural phenomenon has been referred to as *tokenism* (Kanter, 1977). Tokenism describes a situation in which organisational members become “representatives of their category rather than independent individuals” (Kanter, 1977, p. 6). Kanter (1977) proports that discrimination is most likely to occur in skewed ratio groups, where women (or men) make up less than 15% of the workforce. In such a setting, tokens are highly visible and sense a pressure to permanently perform to an

excellent standard. Hence, female tokens often see themselves forced to adapt a masculine leadership style. This renders the often cited phenomenon of “damned if they do, damned if they don’t”; while female leaders with a sensitive style are likely to be viewed as weak, assuming a strong style may decrease evaluations due to perceived violation of gender roles (cf. Johnson et al., 2008).

Overall, research regarding gender composition suggests that tokenism does affect female employees more negatively than their male counterparts. An early study by Sackett, DuBois, and Noe (1991) reported that although women received moderately less favourable job-performance ratings in male-dominated groups, this effect did not show for male tokens. In a similar vein, Simpson’s (2004) qualitative study of male tokens could not confirm disadvantageous effects for male nurses, elementary school teachers or cabin crew. Contrariwise, they were viewed as more competent and authoritative than their female colleagues. As regards token leaders, recent research has yielded only infinitesimal interaction effects of gender composition and leader gender on other-ratings of leader effectiveness (Ko et al., 2015). Arguably, besides high percentages of male workforce, male-dominated industries differ from those that are female-dominated with regard to their cultures, as will be discussed in turn.

Male-dominated industries such as military or government are marked by bureaucratic and hierarchical practices (Rutherford, 2011), deriving from a long history of masculine culture (Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Organisational culture can be defined as a set of “shared basic assumptions, values, and beliefs that characterize a setting and are taught to newcomers as the proper way to think and feel” (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013, p. 362). In this context, masculinity is a consensual belief of what a ‘real man’ should be and do (Kerfoot & Knights, 1996). Masculine culture has often been construed as *hegemonic masculinity* which is characterised by “the subordination of women, the

marginalization of gay men, and the connecting of masculinity to toughness and competitiveness” (Connell, 2000, p. 84). Accordingly, hegemonic masculinity serves as a vehicle to reinforce the higher power status of white, able, heterosexual men (Connell, 2000).

Power is closely related to the ability to mobilise resources (Kanter, 1977). Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) state that women’s lower power status affects their progress into management at three levels of analysis: individually, as their traits and skills are less valued than their male counterparts’; interpersonally, because women have fewer access to peer networks, mentors, and supportive subordinate relations; and organisationally, for women’s restricted position power and control over organisational budgets. However, leadership is a concept of power in its own right – namely the managerial power to “enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task” (Chemers, 2000, p. 27). It follows that women in leader positions possess *managerial power* which poses a threat to *male power*, and evokes men’s resistance (Collinson & Hearn, 1996).

In organisations, hegemonic masculinity is lived through practices that reinforce masculine values (e.g. Chin, 2007). While sometimes displayed blatantly, other practices are discriminatory only at a second glance. Examples of overt practices contain the long work hours culture or “old boy networks” – activities in which men engage much more frequently than women (Rutherford, 2011). Other, ostensibly gender-free, practices such as performance assessments have been argued to promote male over female values and objectives (Martin, 1996). Barreto, Ellemers, Cihangir, and Stroebe (2009) maintain that beyond immediate discrimination effects, a masculine frame of reference in performance contexts can elicit negative self-directed emotions in women, who then unconsciously act in ways that confirm prejudices – similar to the *stereotype threat* effects (Nguyen & Ryan, 2008) discussed earlier. As a consequence, masculine cultures establish subliminal but powerful barriers to women’s progress.

**Organisational culture and climate.** As values and beliefs are subconscious in nature, organisational culture studies have traditionally used qualitative approaches (cf. Schein, 2004). In quantitative studies, climate is often measured to represent the observable part of culture. Schneider et al. (2013) suggest that while climate is concerned with *what* happens in the organisation (procedures, policies, and practices that are being rewarded), culture may provide the reasons as to *why* things are done in a particular way (Schneider et al., 2013). Climate can therefore be seen as a part of culture, or the “culture-embedding mechanisms” of an organisation (Schein, 2004, p. 246). A masculine climate is therefore one in which employees feel that sexual harassment and discrimination against anyone who deviates from the white, able, heterosexual male majority is tolerated (that is, not penalised; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997).

Numerous studies have reported significant moderate effects of masculine climate on the prevalence of discrimination against women (e.g. Chamberlain, Crowley, Tope, & Hodson, 2008; Fitzgerald et al., 1997), ethnic minorities (Bergman, Palmieri, Drasgow, & Ormerod, 2012) and LGBT (Waldo, 1999). Importantly, in all these studies climate effects were stronger than gender composition, and occurred even after controlling for it. Regarding ODC, managerial values could be shown to moderate the positive influence of formal diversity programmes on ODC perceptions, demonstrating employees’ high sensitivity to culture-related subtleties (Herdman & McMillan-Capeheart, 2010). However, there is a notable shortage of quantitative research when it comes to the impact of masculine cultures on female leader discrimination. In fact, the author only found one study by Derks, Ellemers, van Laar, and Groot (2011), which explored the “Queen Bee” phenomenon. Queen Bees refer to senior female managers in masculine cultures who act ostentatiously manly, and overtly engage in negative female stereotyping to achieve their career aspirations. The main finding was that masculine cultures and gender discrimination reliably produce Queen Bees in women

with low levels of gender identification. In turn, Queen Bees contribute to the preponderance of female leader discrimination by endorsing masculine culture.

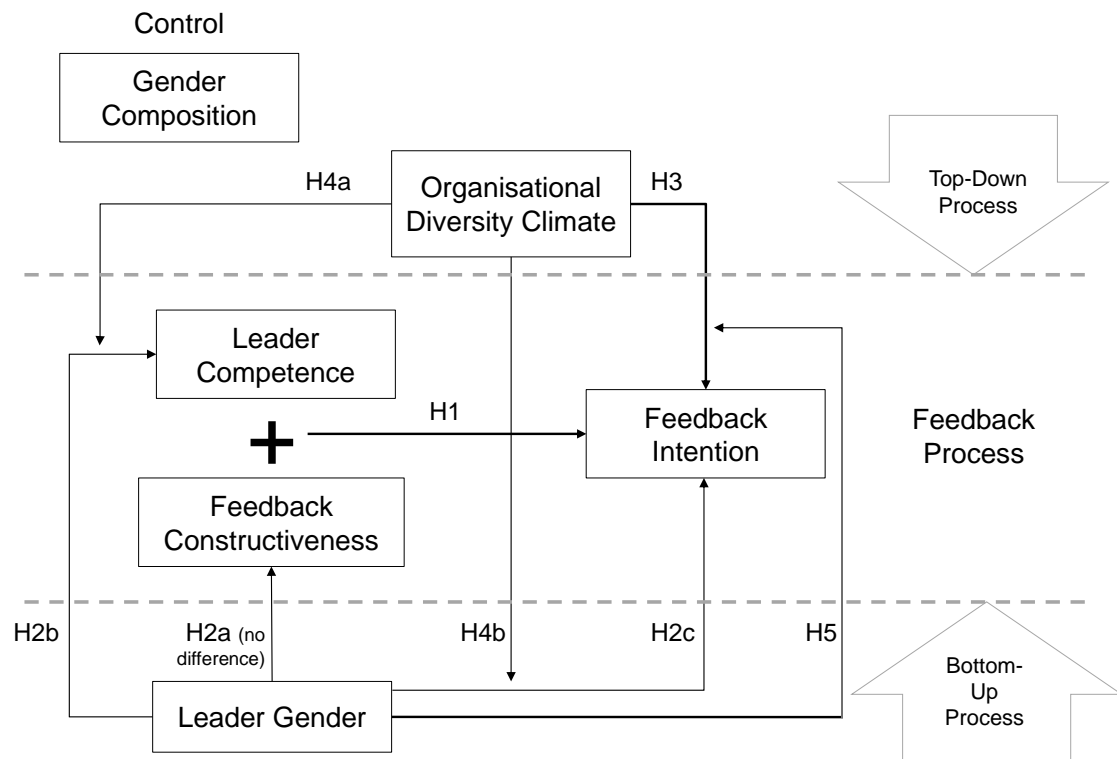


Figure 2. Proposed hypothesis framework of an integrated model of female leadership and ODC.

Taken together, there is compelling evidence that masculine climate enhances the occurrence of discrimination against minorities (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). Diversity climate has extended this unilateral understanding by developing a bipolar concept. Precisely, a supportive ODC is not only one in which discrimination is relentlessly rejected; it is one in which diversity is actively fostered (Pugh et al., 2008). The current study argues therefore that a supportive ODC can be interpreted as an antidote to masculine climate. This stands in logical extension of past research which has demonstrated that minorities value organisational diversity efforts more highly than white men (e.g. Kossek & Zonia, 1993). Precisely, the following was hypothesised (all hypotheses are shown in Figure 2):

*Hypothesis 4a:* The difference between competence ratings of male and female leaders is smaller in a supportive ODC than in an adverse ODC.



*Hypothesis 4b:* The difference between intentions to follow male and female leaders is smaller in a supportive ODC than in an adverse ODC.

*Hypothesis 5:* ODC is a stronger predictor of feedback intentions in the female leader condition.

## Method

### Sample

Participants who are currently working in Europe or North America, and who use English at least as a working language, were recruited via a link which was shared in different social media websites and with personal contacts. A total of 248 participants started the online experiment, and 154 participants (62.1%) mostly completed it. The number of usable datasets was reduced to 146 (see Results), comprised of 66 males (45.2%) and 80 females (54.8%) with a mean age of 28.65 years ( $SD = 8.35$  years). Seventy-three per cent were non-native speakers, the majority of which specified German as their first language (50%), followed by Greek (5%), and Spanish (3%). Out of the non-native speakers, 93% reported to have never or rarely experienced comprehension difficulties throughout the experiment. Thirty-six per cent held a postgraduate degree or higher, and 38% specified an undergraduate qualification as their highest educational level. Eighty-nine per cent of all participants had a white or Caucasian background, with the remainder being Asian (3%), or of another or mixed background (8%). Participants represented a wide range of industries, with the highest percentage working in diverse business functions or consulting (16%), followed by 11% from education, professional or technical services, health and social care, and media and communication, respectively. Eighty-four per cent were currently working in Europe, as opposed to 16% working in North America. The average tenure was 2 years and 9 months ( $SD = 2$  years, 10 months); a look at the histogram revealed that the majority of participants

had only started their jobs very recently, which should be borne in mind when interpreting results. Eighty-four participants (58%) were working 35 hours week or more, and 51 (35%) had part-time contracts. Lastly, 54 participants (37%) indicated to have personnel responsibility as a manager or supervisor.

## Measures

### **Independent variables.**

**Leader gender.** The primary purpose of the experiment consisted in finding any differences between the competence ratings and intentions to follow of male and female leaders in a feedback setting. The feedback setting was realised through a developmental feedback session between the manager of a furniture store and one of their customer advisors (the participant) after supervising a customer meeting. A furniture store was not correlated with any gender in the pre-test,  $r(18) = .06, p = .794$ . This was important as a sex-typed experimental setting may have interfered with potential ODC effects. Leader gender was manipulated through the recording of two identical feedback messages that were spoken by either a male or a female voice. Audio recordings were deemed more viable than videos, as research suggests that particularly female leader's physical attractiveness may have negative effects on follower trust and loyalty (Braun, Peus, & Frey, 2012). The entire scenario was comprised of two parts. First, participants were instructed to read a scenario in which Simon (Julia) was introduced as the new store manager in the furniture shop in which the participant had been working for the last two years. Second, participants listened to the actual feedback recording which resembled an informal, three minutes wrap-up of both the employee's strengths and developmental fields as a customer advisor. The feedback message abided by the principles of constructiveness outlined by Sommer and Kulkarni (2012). Full texts of the scenario and the feedback script are attached in the appendix.

***Organisational diversity climate.*** Organisational DC was measured through a four items scale used by Pugh et al. (2008). The format, a 7-point Likert scale, was in concert with the scales of the dependent variables (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). All items aimed to measure the participants' perceptions of equal opportunities and lack of discrimination within their companies (e.g. "My organisation makes it easy for people from diverse backgrounds to fit in and be accepted";  $\alpha = .87$ ).

### **Dependent variables.**

***Feedback constructiveness.*** Perceived feedback constructiveness was operationalised through the use of a scale by Sommer and Kulkarni (2012). Participants rated the leader's feedback through a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) of seven items, examples include "The feedback was very specific and detailed", and "The feedback was so vague that I would not know what to change" (R). Cronbach's Alpha indicated a good internal consistency for the six items scale,  $\alpha = .80$ .

***Leader competence.*** To measure perceptions of the feedback source, twelve items from Duehr and Bono (2006) were used. In their study, using Schein's (1973) method, these twelve items were most highly associated with the stereotype of successful managers in general (control condition), regardless of gender. Hence, this scale a) represents the competence that the feedback source conveys and b) allows conclusions on the status quo of gender bias in leader stereotypes. Items were introduced by the question "To what extent do you agree with the following statements concerning the manager as a person?" and included statements such as "was consistent in their claims", or "showed leadership ability" ( $\alpha = .92$ ). The answering format used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

***Feedback intention.*** To measure the participants' intentions, they were asked how likely on a 7-point Likert scale they were to show three specific reactions to the feedback they had received, namely "I would begin my next customer meeting with some minutes of

smalltalk”, “I would ask my customers additional probing questions to realise cross-selling opportunities”, and “I would participate in the voluntary communication skills training on saturday in two weeks time” (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*). Although Cronbach’s Alpha was relatively low ( $\alpha = .61$ ), the three items were computed to a composite score as their means differed less than 0.4 points, and histograms and preliminary analyses did not indicate deviant distributions or regression models for the three items.

### **Controls.**

***Gender composition.*** Gender composition was adopted as a control variable in analyses including both ODC and leader gender. As outlined above, tokenism has been discussed to reinforce discrimination especially against women (cf. Kanter, 1977).

Participants were asked to indicate the percentage of male co-workers within their work team on a 11-point scale (0% to 100%) because employees’ responses are expected to be more accurate when considering their team, rather than the entire organisation. Moreover, gender composition of teams vs. organisations has indicated high multicollinearity ( $r = .82$ ) in former research, suggesting that team compositions are representative of organisational level distributions (Sackett et al., 1991).

***First language.*** First language was considered as a confounding variable, as non-native speakers might differ from native speakers in their understanding and interpretation of feedback. However, as preliminary analyses did not indicate significant effects of first language on any DV, first language was not retained for regression modelling.

### **Research Design and Procedure**

The research design was made up of an online experiment which aimed to measure between-subjects differences between the two experimental groups on any of the DVs. The experiment was created using the Qualtrics tool, and the link distributed through different social media and personal and business contacts of the author. Of the final sample of 146, 68

participants were randomly assigned to the female manager, as opposed to 78 to the male manager condition. Prior to starting the experiment, participants were informed that the experiment had received ethical approval. They were then required to give their informed consent to the confidentiality and nature of the experiment, and an opportunity to partake in a prize draw at the end was pointed out. Moreover, contact details were provided at the beginning and end of the experiment. The experiment lasted for an estimated 15 minutes. A flow chart is depicted in Figure 3.

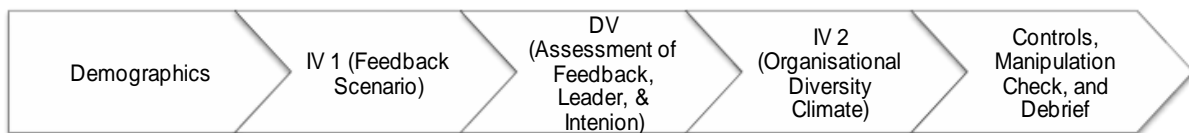


Figure 3. Flow chart of online experiment.

After completing the study, participants were required to report if they had listened to a male or female manager to check the validity of the manipulation. Also, non-native speakers were asked to indicate their language proficiency as this was regarded substantial to process the audio sequence. Lastly, participants were debriefed regarding the research rationale and invited to the prize draw.

## Results

Screening and cleaning of the data was conducted prior to analysis. This procedure included defining system-missing values, recoding of one variable within the *feedback constructiveness* scale, checking all variables for meaningful means and ranges, and running a missing data analysis. The latter revealed that overall, 2.94% of items were missing, with all three dependent variables (DVs) showing percentages around 3%. Little's MCAR test was not significant, confirming that data were missing completely at random;  $X^2(240) = 198.13, p =$

.98. Therefore, expectation maximisation was used as an efficient yet robust method to impute missing data for the DVs and ODC (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Categorical and dichotomous variables were handled using a pairwise deletion in the respective analyses.

One case was deleted after indicating an incorrect leader gender in the manipulation check. Next, composite scores for the DVs and ODC were computed. To check for normality and outliers, histograms and descriptive statistics of all variables were inspected. A total of 7 cases were cleared from the dataset as they constituted outliers ( $z > 3.29$ ) on *tenure in months*, *age*, or both – indicating that they were not representative of the sample population and might skew statistical procedures (Field, 2009). All DVs and ODC showed values below 2 for skewness, and 7 for kurtosis, confirming acceptable normality (Curran, West, & Finch, 1996). However, as all four scales were moderately negatively skewed, the square root transformation described by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) was followed and the scales re-reflected afterwards to ensure normality assumptions. Mahalanobis Distances across all quantitative scales yielded no multivariate outliers (no probabilities at  $p < .001$ ; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), leaving 146 cases for analysis.

Bivariate correlations were calculated with all quantitative variables to confirm linearity, and reject multicollinearity. Scatterplots suggested linear relationships among all variables, and no higher correlation than .66 ( $N = 146, p < .001$ ) – maybe not surprisingly between *leader competence* and *feedback constructiveness* – was found, which lowered the risk of redundant scales to a minimum. Table 2 depicts means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations for all variables after data cleaning.

Table 2  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations of All Variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Age	28.65	8.35	-												
2 Participant Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.55	0.50	.04	-											
3 Education <sup>b</sup>	1.91	0.80	-.35**	-.03	-										
4 Leader Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.47	0.50	.01	-.08	.04	-									
5 Leader Competence	1.93	0.26	.01	.18*	.08	-.01	-								
6 Feedback Constructiveness	1.73	0.25	.13	.21*	.07	.03	.66**	-							
7 Feedback Intention	1.95	0.32	.10	.04	-.05	.01	.50**	.42**	-						
8 ODC	1.96	0.36	-.12	-.03	.14	-.13	.10	.10	.22**	-					
9 Gender Diversity <sup>c</sup>	54.30	23.85	.03	-.28**	-.01	-.05	.12	.02	.18*	.04	-				
10 Tenure in Months	30.92	34.30	.66**	-.05	-.26**	-.12	-.05	-.02	.08	-.02	.11	-			
11 Company Size <sup>d</sup>	3.23	1.54	-.06	-.22**	-.10	-.02	-.04	-.03	-.11	-.08	.11	.00	-		
12 Work Hours <sup>e</sup>	0.38	0.49	-.30**	.37**	.21*	.12	.06	.10	-.50	.01	-.17*	-.34**	-.28**	-	
13 Personnel Responsibility <sup>f</sup>	0.60	0.49	-.16	.11	.22*	.04	.09	-.10	-.13	.01	.00	-.31**	.01	.23**	-
14 Current Manager Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.33	0.47	-.10	.26**	.01	.10	.00	.10	-.06	-.01	-.56**	-.13	-.09	.32**	.03

Note. ODC = Organisational Diversity Climate. *N* ranges from 130 to 146. All 7-point Likert scales (5, 6, 7, and 8) have been square-root transformed and therefore range from  $\sqrt{1} = 1$  to  $\sqrt{7} = 2.65$ .

<sup>a</sup>0 = male, 1 = female. <sup>b</sup>1 = "Postgraduate Degree or higher", 2 = "Undergraduate Degree", 3 = "Completed School Education", 4 = "none of the above" <sup>c</sup>% of male staff. <sup>d</sup>1 = "1 - 15", 2 = "16 - 50", 3 = "51 - 250", 4 = "251 - 1,000", 5 = "more than 1,000". <sup>e</sup>0 = "35 hours or more", 1 = "less than 35 hours". <sup>f</sup>0 = yes, 1 = no.

\*  $p < .05$  (two-tailed). \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

## The Feedback Process

A multiple hierarchical regression (MLR) analysis with two steps was run to test if perceived leader competence (LC) as a measure of the feedback source has predictive validity regarding feedback intentions (FI) over and above feedback constructiveness (FC; Hypothesis 1). As shown in Table 4 (Step 1 and 2), after entering LC into the regression model, FC did not longer significantly predict FI,  $\beta = .15$ ,  $t(144) = 1.60$ ,  $p = .111$ . LC, however, predicted FI highly significantly,  $\beta = .40$ ,  $t(144) = 4.16$ ,  $p < .001$ . This indicated that LC accounted for notable variance in FC within the model. Overall, after entering both predictors the regression model explained 25% of variance in FI,  $F(2,143) = 25.43$ ,  $p < .001$ . Hypothesis 1 was confirmed as the feedback source exerted an important effect on the formation of feedback intentions.

## Leader Gender

Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c predicted significant main effects of leader gender (LG) on LC and FI, but not on FC. Initial independent t-tests did not yield significant results for any of the three variables, as shown in Table 3. However, as the correlation matrix indicated significant correlations of participant gender (PG) with LC,  $r(144) = .18$ ,  $p = .034$ , and FC,  $r(144) = .21$ ,  $p = .012$ , a two-way independent ANOVA was conducted to test for potential LG x PG interactions on all DVs. Interaction effects became significant for LC,  $F(1,142) = 4.28$ ,  $p = .040$ , and for FI,  $F(1,142) = 4.43$ ,  $p = .037$ , but not for FC,  $F(1,142) = 0.24$ ,  $p = .626$ . Both interactions were cross-sex interactions, characterised by female followers' more favourable rating of male leaders, and vice versa. Hence, mean comparison tests were repeated within the PG subgroups (all values depicted in Table 3).



Table 3  
*t*-Tests of Leader Gender Overall Effects, and Separated by Participant Gender (N = 146)

	Male leader		Female leader		<i>t</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )		
<b>Leader Competence</b>						
Total	78	1.93 (0.27)	68	1.93 (0.26)	0.97	0.01
Male participants	38	1.84 (0.30)	28	1.93 (0.28)	-1.22	0.31
Female participants	40	2.02 (0.21)	40	1.93 (0.24)	1.78 <sup>†</sup>	0.40
<b>Feedback Constructiveness</b>						
Total	78	1.72 (0.24)	68	1.73 (0.26)	0.97	0.05
Male participants	38	1.68 (0.24)	28	1.66 (0.25)	0.28	0.08
Female participants	40	1.76 (0.24)	40	1.79 (0.26)	-0.42	0.12
<b>Feedback Intention</b>						
Total	78	1.95 (0.31)	68	1.95 (0.34)	0.97	0.01
Male participants	38	1.88 (0.31)	28	2.01 (0.30)	-1.69 <sup>†</sup>	0.43
Female participants	40	2.01 (0.30)	40	1.91 (0.37)	1.31	0.30

Note. Cohen's *d* refers to effect size of independent *t*-test mean differences between ratings of the male and female leader.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$  (two-tailed).

According to Cohen's (1969) classification, a *d* around 0.2 signifies small effects, and a *d* around 0.5 means a moderate effect. Due to low statistical power, differences became at best marginally significant. However, effect sizes of cross-sex bias were small to moderate regarding LC and FI. Taken together, there was no evidence for overall LG differences on any of the three DVs, thus lending support to Hypothesis 2b. Hypotheses 2a and 2c, which had predicted that male leaders would obtain significantly higher ratings on LC and FI, had to be rejected, as this hypothesis could only be confirmed for female followers, and the reverse effect showed in male followers.

### Organisational Diversity Climate

Hypothesis 3 addressed the role of ODC in the prediction of FI beyond variables that are directly concerned with the feedback message or source. Accordingly, OCD was added as a third step to the former MLR (Hypothesis 1). Results of all three steps are displayed in Table 4. The model suggests that OCD accounted for a total 17% of variance in FI,  $t(144) =$

2.31. The percentage of variance explained was increased by 3%,  $F(3,142) = 19.25$ ,  $p < .001$ , thus demonstrating the relevance of OCD in the feedback context.

Table 4

*MLR of Feedback Intention on Feedback Constructiveness, Leader Competence, and ODC (N = 146)*

Predictors	Intention to Act Upon Feedback		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Step 1			
Feedback Constructiveness	.42**	.15	.14
Step 2			
Leader Competence		.40**	.39**
Step 3			
Organisational Diversity Climate			.17*
$\Delta R^2$		.09**	.03*
$R^2$	.17**	.26**	.29**
Adjusted $R^2$	.17**	.25**	.27**

Note: Values indicate standardised beta coefficients.  $\Delta R^2$  = change in  $R^2$ .

\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .

### Interactions of ODC and Leader Gender

Hypothesis 4 predicted that LG interacts with ODC such that female leaders would be more highly rated on LC (Hypothesis 4a) and FI (Hypothesis 4b) in a supportive diversity climate, whereas no such increase would occur for male leaders. To acknowledge the significant interaction effect between PG and LG found earlier, PG was adopted as an independent variable in this operation. ODC was transformed into a dichotomous variable through a median split. Then, two three-way [2 (female vs. male leader) x 2 (female vs. male participant) x 2 (supportive vs. adverse ODC)] ANCOVAs were performed with LC and FI as the respective outcome variables (see Table 5). As argued earlier, gender composition (GP) was added as a covariate to control for its presumed impact in both procedures. Additionally, to ensure consistency throughout all analyses, LC and FC were held constant in the second ANCOVA.

Table 5  
 ANCOVAs with Leader Gender, Participant Gender, and ODC for Leader Competence and Feedback Intention (N = 146)

	Leader Competence		Feedback Intention	
	F	partial $\eta^2$	F	partial $\eta^2$
<b>Covariates</b>				
Feedback Constructiveness			4.13*	.03
Leader Competence			10.35**	.07
Gender Composition	3.87 <sup>†</sup>	.03	2.89 <sup>†</sup>	.02
<b>Predictors</b>				
Leader Gender	0.00	.00	0.16	.00
Participant Gender	6.13*	.04	0.30	.00
ODC	1.10	.01	3.80 <sup>†</sup>	.03
LG x PG	4.14*	.03	3.09 <sup>†</sup>	.02
LG x ODC	0.01	.00	0.00	.00
PG x ODC	0.36	.00	0.02	.00
LG x PG x ODC	0.68	.01	0.09	.00

Note. ODC = Organisational Diversity Climate. LG = Leader Gender. PG = Participant Gender.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Beside the expected significance of FC ( $F(1,136) = 104.56, p < .001$ ), gender composition exerted a marginally significant effect on LC in the first ANCOVA,  $F(1,136) = 3.86, p = .052$ , suggesting a positive relationship between the percentage of male co-workers in the participant's work-team, and their ratings of LC. In line with the former tests, the interaction between PG and LG remained significant,  $F(1,136) = 9.70, p = .002$ . Apart from that, there were no significant effects. Thus, Hypothesis 4a could not be confirmed. The second ANCOVA on FI revealed similar results (see Table 5, right column). Again, the LG x PG interaction remained marginally significant after holding the two feedback variables and gender composition constant,  $F(1,137) = 3.09, p = .081$ . Lending further support to Hypothesis 3 above, ODC yielded a marginally significant main effect,  $F(1,137) = 3.80, p = .053$ . To simultaneously visualise the main effect of ODC, and the LG x PG interaction on FI ratings, a new variable *leader follower combination* was computed. Figure 4 shows changes in FI in supportive vs. adverse ODC for all four leader follower combinations. It becomes evident from the plot that the highest intentions were indicated by male followers when

instructed by a female leader. In contrast, female leaders produced the lowest intentions in female followers. However, Hypotheses 4a and 4b were rejected due to the lack of significant interactions between OCD with either LG alone, or LG and PG.

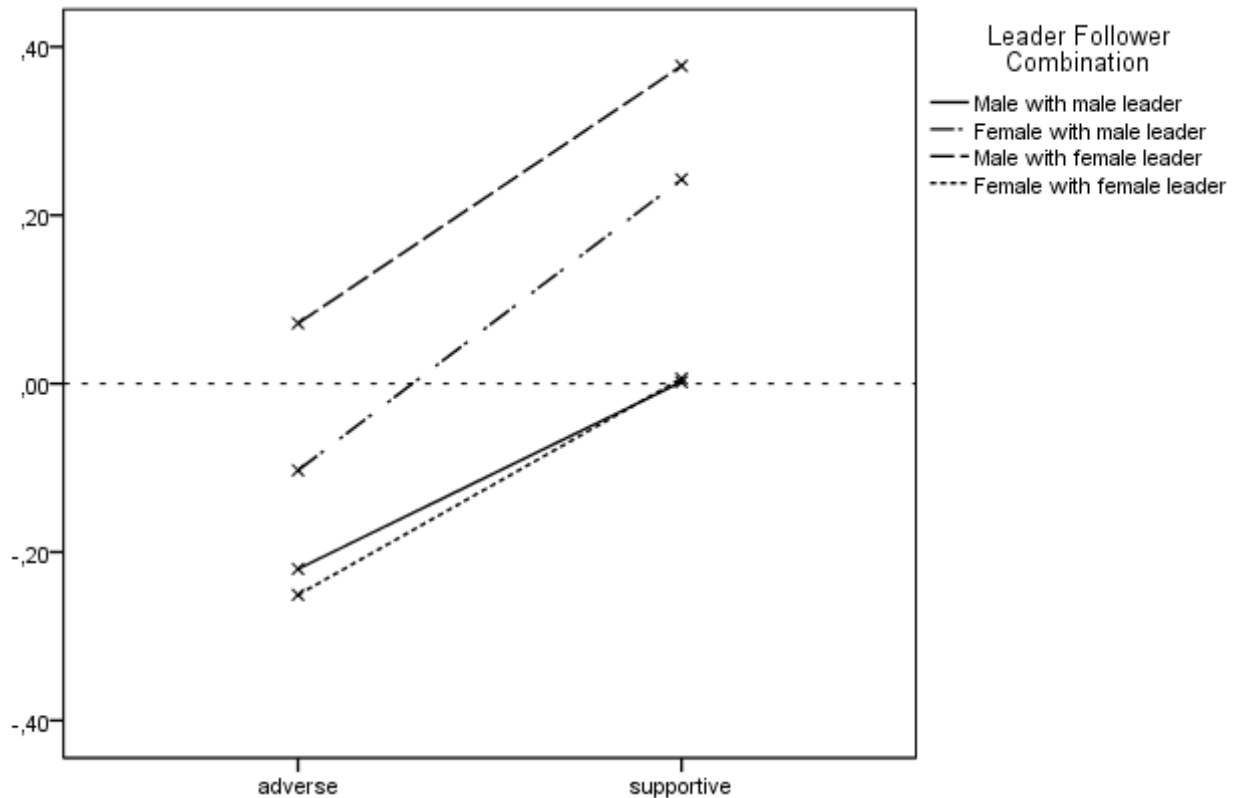


Figure 4. Main effect of ODC on feedback intention separated by leader follower combinations ( $n$  varies between 28 and 40).

Finally, Hypothesis 5 suggested that ODC is a stronger predictor of FI in female than in male leaders. Hypothesis 5 differed from Hypothesis 4b in the way that Hypothesis 5 was concerned with the strength of relationship between ODC and FI depending on LG. Precisely, it proposed a moderating effect of LG in the relationship between ODC and FI. Therefore, testing the hypothesis required regression modelling rather than analysis of variance. To test LG as a moderator, the method and formulas proposed by Paternoster, Brame, Mazerolle, & Piquero (1998) was followed. Two reasons led to this decision. First, Paternoster et al. (1998) have provided compelling evidence for the accuracy of their method, particularly in MLR. Second, by employing two separate regressions as suggested by the authors, the differential

impact of a multitude of variables in predicting FI could be made visible, and compared for male and female leaders<sup>2</sup>.

Accordingly, two separate MLR for the male and female leader condition were run (see Table 6). Again, ODC as the focal variable was entered in a second step after first entering LC, FC, gender composition, and participant gender. Although the adjusted  $R^2$  values suggested a large effect size (Cohen, 1969) for female leaders ( $F(5,62) = 10.64$ ,  $R^2 = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $f^2 = 0.72$ ) as opposed to a small effect size for male leaders ( $F(5,72) = 4.11$ ,  $R^2 = .17$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $f^2 = 0.20$ ), Fisher's  $Z$  test for independent correlation coefficients did not become significant,  $z = 1.63$ ,  $p = .104$  (two-tailed). However, according to Cohen (1969), the obtained  $q = 0.28$  signified a medium effect size of the difference. Next, single predictors were inspected and tested for significant differences. Interestingly, ODC significantly predicted FI for female leaders ( $t(66) = 2.37$ ,  $\beta = .22$ ,  $p = .021$ ), and explained an additional 5% of variance after entering all control variables,  $F(1,62) = 5.62$ ,  $p = .021$ . Neither was the case for male leaders, as can be derived from Table 6. However, the difference of ODC slopes = .113 was too small to become statistically significant,  $z = 0.89$ ,  $p = .188$  (one-tailed). Despite this preliminary evidence, Hypothesis 5 was rejected.

Although not directly addressed in the hypothesis, other slope differences were tested, too, as FC and PG exerted main effects on FI only towards female leaders (see Table 6 for beta weights). In concert with former analyses, the PG slopes were significantly different,  $z = 1.03$ ,  $p = .04$  (two-tailed). A differential impact of FC could not be statistically confirmed,  $z = 1.16$ ,  $p = .25$  (two-tailed). For all regression analyses described in the results section,

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<sup>2</sup> A common method to test for moderator effects of dichotomous variables in linear regression involves including an interaction term in the overall regression model and testing for significant increases in  $R^2$ . However, this method has been criticised for its inaccuracy in MLR (e.g. Aguinis, 2004). Moreover, Paternoster et al. (1998) found that the common  $t$  statistic to calculate standard errors results in an underestimation of the true standard deviation in the population, thus causing Type I errors. These authors therefore recommend the use of a corrected  $z$  statistic, which they could show to predict alpha levels more accurately than the  $t$  values.

assumptions of normality were met for residuals. The final hypothesis framework is displayed in Figure 5 in the Discussion section.

Table 6  
*MLRs of Feedback Intention Separated by Leader Gender, and Statistics of Slope Differences*

Predictors	Intention to Act Upon Feedback				$\Delta$ slope	$Z^a$
	Male Leader ( $n = 78$ )		Female Leader ( $n = 68$ )			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2		
Step 1						
Constant	0.919	0.788	0.314	0.027		
Feedback Constructiveness	.08	.07	.32*	.29*	.286	1.16
Leader Competence	.32*	.31*	.36*	.35**	.114	0.47
Gender Composition	.17	.17	.11	.10	.001	0.71
Participant Gender	.14	.14	-.18 <sup>†</sup>	-.17 <sup>†</sup>	.203	2.05*
Step 2						
Organisational Diversity Climate		.08		.22*	.113	0.89
$\Delta R^2$		.01		.05*		
$R^2$	.22**	.22**	.41***	.46***		
Adjusted $R^2$	.17**	.17**	.38***	.42***		

Note. Values indicate standardised beta coefficients unless otherwise indicated.  $\Delta R^2$  = change in  $R^2$ .

<sup>a</sup> corrected Z estimates of difference unstandardised coefficient regressions taken from Step 2 (computed with the formula provided by Paternoster et al., 1998). All  $p$  values are two-tailed except for ODC, as Hypothesis 5 predicted a higher impact of ODC on FI for female leaders.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

This study overcame two shortcomings in earlier research and theory. First, feedback intentions as an antecedent of behaviour change were assessed beyond leader competence ratings and perceptions of feedback constructiveness. Second, female leadership was approached from a diversity perspective. This involved the integration of diversity and female leadership concepts, and the experimental testing of interaction effects between ODC and leader gender on employee perceptions and intention-building.

As a fundament for further analysis, it could be confirmed that perceived leader competence is predictive of participants' intentions over and above perceived feedback constructiveness. This finding is in line with Ilgen et al. (1979). Moreover, the impact of LC on FI was found to be stronger than that of FC, thereby supporting former findings on the

relevance of source credibility particularly when feedback is not only positive (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004). Two explanations for this outcome are imaginable. First, the overwhelming impact of LC may be partly due to the order in which participants responded to the items. As LC items were presented prior to FC items, participants' FC items might have been coloured by their responses to LC. Contrariwise, two reasons justified this proceeding; as LC ratings were used to assess prescriptive stereotypes in female leaders, gathering the respective responses was deemed of higher priority than FC ratings. Second, the moderate impact of FC within female leader feedback (see Hypothesis 5) suggests that participants did still carefully assess the quality of the received feedback beyond their perception of the leaders' competence.

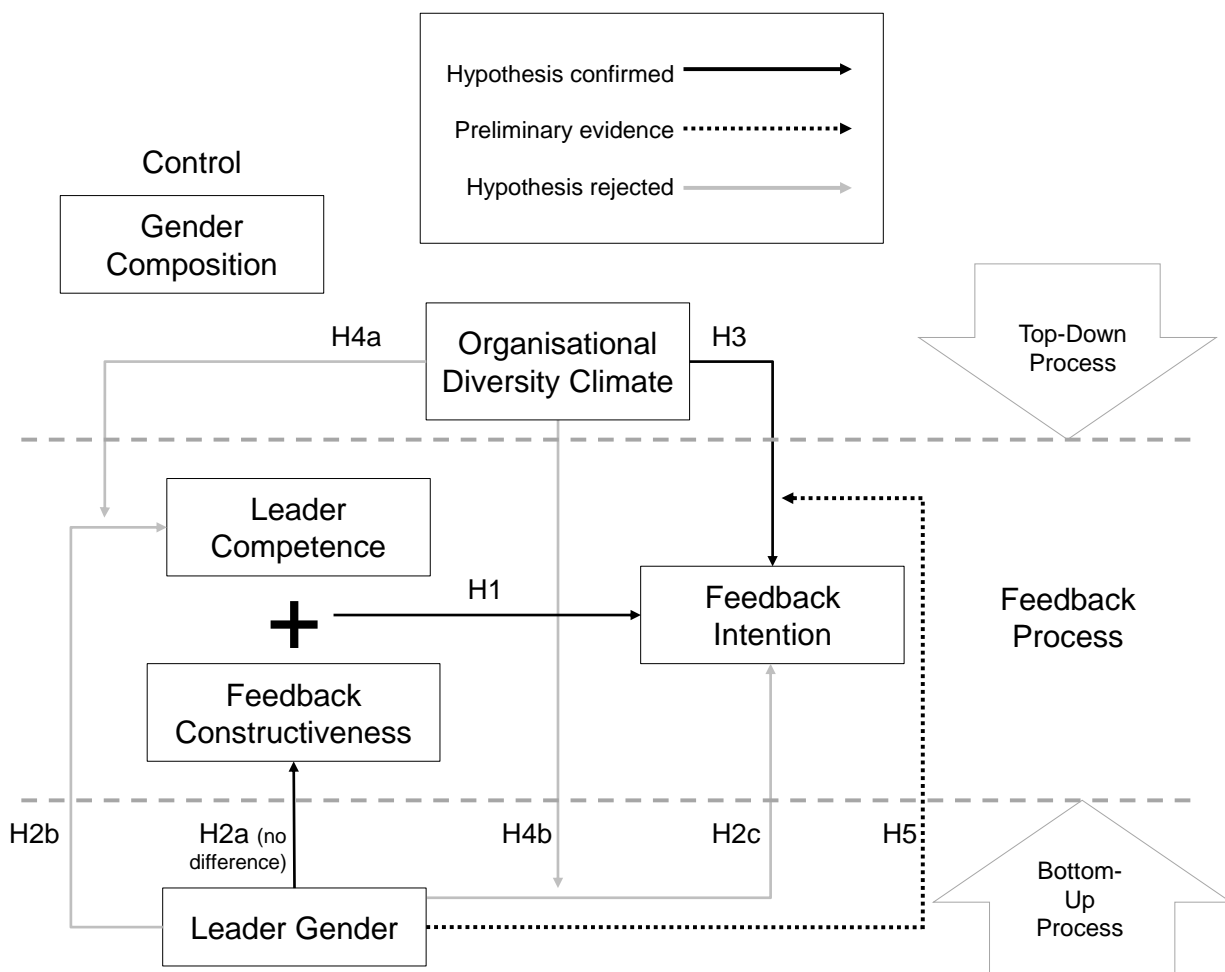


Figure 5. Final framework.

The embedded experiment, which employed a scenario and feedback messages spoken by a male or female manager of a furniture store, served to test the preponderance of prescriptive female leader stereotypes. According to RCT (Eagly & Karau, 2002), such stereotypes lead to unfavourable ratings of female managers as these are thought to violate their expected gender roles. As predicted, no interaction or main effects were found for FC. In opposition to past experimental research in which female leader stereotyping still prevails (Heilman et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 2008), a predicted discrimination of female leaders in the form of lower ratings on LC and FI was not supported by the data in the current study. Rather, a cross-sex bias emerged on these variables, indicating that female leaders were evaluated less favourably by female participants, while obtaining higher ratings from male participants. The subsequent follow-up analyses yielded small to moderate interaction effects.

However, at second glance, the lack of a significant main effect of leader gender might be in line with literature on stereotype impact. Research suggests that stereotypes become less influential the more information on ratees are accessible (Blau, 1977; Davison & Burke, 2000) – particularly, when there are performance-specific cues available (Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006). Laboratory studies are often realised through brief written vignettes that are administered to student samples (cf. Eagly et al., 1992). The current study differed from such designs in three respects. First, the absence of a main effect may have arisen from the consciously gender-neutral industry that was chosen for the scenario. Despite the male-gendered occupation of a manager, the gender-free industry may have mitigated perceptions of role violation (cf. Heilman et al., 2004). Second, the leaders in the current study were evaluated by a working population. It is widely supported that stereotyping decreases when individuals are exposed to targets more frequently (Duehr & Bono, 2006; Fiske, 1998), as is rather the case in a working than student population. Third, the recorded feedback message comprised three minutes; sufficient time for participants to gather performance-specific indicators (feedback skills) to minimise heuristic information processing. Apart from that,



another most desirable interpretation is that these findings add to the evidence of a general decrease in descriptive stereotypes (Duehr & Bono, 2006). As researchers have argued, there might be a reciprocal relationship between stereotypes towards female leaders, and the shift in many formerly male-dominated industries towards more gender-neutral workforces (Ayman & Korabik, 2010).

Arguably, the extensive exposure to the scenario might also have prevented same-sex bias (Blau, 1977; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Still, it does not account for the cross-sex favouritism found in the current study. Two not mutually exclusive views are possible; participants may have been negatively biased towards same-sex participants, or positively biased towards other-sex participants. Among the reviewed studies, only Elsesser and Lever (2011) reported cross-sex bias. These authors found that employee competitiveness moderated the bias, as rivalry was far more common in same-sex than cross-sex employee-manager dyads. Another reason may lie in the feedback source's attractiveness. Attraction is discussed by Ilgen et al. (1979) as a predictor of feedback acceptance, which in turn mediates intentions. A meta-analysis by Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, and Longo (1991) concluded that target attractiveness produces significant moderate to large effects on a range of subject ratings such as targets' social competence, potency, and general evaluations. It is conceivable that there was a cross-sex bias in leader voice attractiveness deriving from heterosexual mating interests. Still, both assumed mechanisms are speculative as neither attractiveness nor competitiveness were assessed in this study. Taken together, the relationship between leader gender and feedback-related outcomes proved complex, and requires further testing.

Second, positive main effects of ODC were investigated. ODC predicted FI positively, and significantly increased the prediction solely based on feedback-related variables. This held true for male and female leaders, and after controlling for gender composition. However, regarding interaction effects with leader gender, the cross-sex bias of LC and FI ratings did

not differ depending on whether participants worked in a supportive or adverse ODC. Taken together with the LG x PG interaction effects discussed above, it follows that intentions to follow feedback were generally higher in a supportive environment, but that ODC did not change the magnitude of cross-sex bias. Moreover, ODC did not directly influence evaluations of LC. It can be concluded that a positive diversity climate may not erase prescriptive stereotypes in followers per sé (as indicated by the lack of a significant main effect of ODC on LC) – but, and maybe more importantly, it inhibits the adverse impact of stereotyping on female leaders. Therefore, these findings corroborate the top-down mechanism in which ODC affects individual and organisational outcomes (Cox, 1994).

Lastly, models of intention formation were compared by leader gender. Overall, the model explained higher percentages of variance in the female as opposed to male leader condition. In the female leader condition, ODC predicted FI significantly and moderately, whereas for male leaders, ODC influence was neglectable. Although this difference was not significant, it provides preliminary evidence that ODC might be particularly important to followers' acceptance and endorsement of female as compared to male leaders. In a similar vein, FC was (not significantly) more predictive of FI in female leaders. This finding suggests that followers might be more sensitive to the quality of a feedback given by a woman, while male leaders are not judged to the same extent by the message contents. In conjunction with the overall better fit of the model in female leaders, an interesting conclusion arises; unlike detrimental stereotyping towards female leaders, the data implied a "beneficial stereotype" toward male leaders. Perhaps, employees have learned to exert caution regarding preconceived evaluations of female leaders thanks to companies' gender initiatives and the lively public discourse. In contrast, they might accept men merely due to their leader status, leaving their perceptions stereotypically positive rather than differentiated.

## **Practical Implications**

This study provides important implications for organisational practice. A principal finding was that leader perceptions do not by default differ as a function of leader gender. Rather, female leadership is a multilevel process, and its linkages with organisational diversity are not straightforward. Diverse workforces and manager teams are a central feature in today's organisations, and are likely to be even more so in the future. It is thus essential to organisational success to manage diversity effectively especially with regards to sociodemographic attributes.

The rationale of the study purported that organisations can actively communicate a diversity-positive culture which shape employee perceptions and, importantly, behaviour. The findings of the current study support that ODC increases followers' intentions to act upon feedback beyond individual and structural factors, which is in logical extension of former research (e.g. Wolfson et al., 2011). Furthering past theoretical and practical discussions around the subject, ODC may prove invaluable specifically for female leaders (Korabik & Ayman, 2007; Kossek & Zonia, 1993). Hence, organisations should be strongly encouraged to implement a consistent and holistic strategy to manage diversity within organisations.

As regards gender diversity in leadership, it is central to such a strategy that it fully supports the business case argument (Rutherford, 2011), corroborated by research on the benefits of transformational leadership (Eagly et al., 2003). Cultural consistency and credibility should form key considerations at all times (cf. Herdman & McMillan-Capeheart, 2010). Diversity management then forms the required top-down process to raise awareness of stereotype functioning, enforce sanctioning of discriminatory treatment and ensure competency-based, gender-neutral goal-setting and assessment (Korabik & Ayman, 2007). Respective programmes may entail diversity trainings for work groups, women's networks, and gender-fair assessment procedures (Chin, 2007).

Male champions have been argued to assume lead roles in advocating gender initiatives<sup>3</sup> (Catalyst, 2009), as men in masculine cultures form the main source of resistance to female leadership advancement (Collinson & Hearn, 1996). In the light of the cross-sex bias found in the current study, engaging men to advocate a gender-inclusive workplace might now prove more powerful than ever, as male followers' favourable reactions to female leaders suggest that they are ready to value female leadership. To paraphrase Kimmel's (2012) conclusion, gender differences do not cause gender inequality in organisations – it is the reverse pathway.

### **Limitations and Theoretical Implications**

As all research, the results of this study are not without limitations. Some limitations will be discussed in the following, regarding the sample, method, and generalisability of the results. First, despite being a convenience sample, participants reflected a wide range of industries, nationalities, and socioeconomic attributes. However, there was a restriction of range regarding age, with 75% of participants being under the age of 40. Additionally, sensitivity analyses revealed that a sample size of 146 was not sufficient to detect some of the smaller effect sizes at  $\alpha = .05$ , as was the case for the differential impact of ODC in female and male leaders. However, as Eagly and Carli (2003, p. 826) have reasoned, even small effect sizes can have substantial effects in organisational settings. To corroborate the preliminary evidence obtained in this study, future research should aim to deploy greater and age-diverse samples to improve the external validity of the findings (Goldman et al., 2006).

Second, two limitations concerning the measures should be noted. ODC is by definition a score which is aggregated and averaged among a work unit, as it reflects shared perceptions. Despite this, ODC was studied at the individual level since data were obtained

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<sup>3</sup> Men Advocating Real Change (MARC) is a 2015 initiative by Catalyst. The online community provides a platform for corporate men to discuss and engage in gender diversity activities in their companies. More information available at <http://onthemarc.org/home>.

from a convenient sample. Therefore, conclusions on organisational level outcomes should be made with caution. Perhaps, this also implies an explanation for the unexpected zero-correlation between ODC and participant gender. An improved design might measure ODC scores from teams employed in different organisations, and have the respective team members complete the experiment. Thus, the relevance of ODC across organisations could be investigated while retaining the controllability of a laboratory setting.

The second concern lies with FI as a DV in the experiment. The scale encompassed three items which did not reach a good level of internal consistency. Hence, FI should be measured in a more rigorous fashion. Moreover, intentions are highly associated with actual behaviour, yet do not fully account for it (Ajzen, 1991). This drawback seems the hardest to come by. Assessing behaviour would essentially be at the expense of experimental rigour, because the low accuracy of manipulated feedback is unlikely to produce behaviour change in a real employment setting (cf. Ilgen et al., 1979). Overall, this study enabled new insights into ODC as a contingency of organisational culture in the evaluation of female leaders. Still, research is needed to confirm these auspicious effects – involving greater, diverse samples with group level scores of ODC, and robust measures of intentions.

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## Appendix

### A1. Feedback Scenario

*Please imagine the following scenario and imagine your own thoughts, feelings, and bodily reactions throughout the lecture. It does not have to apply perfectly to your own job role; just try to identify with the scenario as closely as possible.*

For two years, you have been working as a customer advisor in a successful furniture and furnishing store. Overall, you enjoy your job role a lot and think that you are good at advising and selling. A couple of weeks ago, the store got a new manager, Julia [Simon]. She [he] seems friendly, but also expects a lot of her [his] employees. For the end of next year, she [he] has set some very ambitious sales targets for your team.

To ensure that your team can meet these targets, Julia [Simon] wants to optimise the customer service. Therefore, she [he] visits customer meetings of each team member, followed by personal feedback sessions. Yesterday, Julia [Simon] attended one of your meetings. The customers you consulted were a young married couple whom you assisted in planning the kitchen for their new flat. Luckily, you think that it went really well for you. Today, your personal feedback session will take place.

### A2. Feedback Script

Good morning, please – have a seat, help yourself to a drink... First of all, thanks a lot for your time this morning. So as I already let you know, the aim of these supervision activities is to provide each team member some bespoke developmental feedback. My expectation for our team is to build sustainable and personal customer relations, and the feedback will really help you to transfer this vision into practice.

So yesterday, I saw you in the meeting with this young couple. As you told me afterwards, you were satisfied with your own performance. Well – so am I! Let's start with some of my positive points: Well. Overall, I gained the impression that you have very good knowledge of the products and services we are offering. What I also liked was that you could answer all of the couple's questions in a



way that was informative yet very structured – that made it easy for them to understand the differences between the three presented solutions. However, as you might think, there are also some points I suggest you work on. First, I noticed that you started the meeting straightaway without engaging in – what we would call – some smalltalk. Yeah, I know... I mean, you certainly don't have to spend 15 minutes talking weather, *but* I want you to make the customers feel that you are personally interested in them... You could just ask them if it took them long to find their apartment, as we all know how hard the housing market is at the moment. These bits are *so* simple but can have an *incredible* impact on trust-building in customer relations.

Second, I observed two occasions where I felt you had missed out on opportunities to probe the couple's potential needs. For example, at some point the girl said she'd prefer a wider gap between the counters and the wall, so that they could even fit their old fridge in there if they had to... There, you could have enquired a bit if they possibly need a new fridge... You know; did they know that we offer fridges from as little as 139 pounds? And that these energy stars could easily save them 70 pounds a year compared to a 10-year-old device? Well; I am sure you get the idea. Sometimes, these are very rewarding cross-selling opportunities. So really try and enhance your awareness for these little cues that the customers send.

So, all in all, I really like your engagement and that you enjoy talking to customers. And I am convinced that you have some potential to even improve your sales skills. In fact, there will be a communication skills training run on Saturday in two weeks time; it's voluntarily and open to the whole team, but I would highly encourage you to take part. How does that sound to you?