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Solving the crisis: When agency is the preferred leadership for implementing change

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ABSTRACT

Glass-cliff research shows that female leaders are preferentially selected in a crisis to signal change and not for their leadership qualifications. In parallel, the management literature urges for agentic “masculine” leadership to turn around organizations in crisis. We hypothesized that, regardless of their gender, agentic leaders should be preferred to communal leaders if leadership qualifications and actual change potential motivate leader selection. Three experimental studies demonstrated that agentic (vs. communal) candidates were perceived to match poorly-performing (vs. strongly-performing) companies. This effect was accounted for by perceptions of agentic candidates’ higher suitability, higher task-orientation (versus person-orientation), and higher change potential. We discuss that women face ambiguity as to why they become leaders in crisis contexts: because they are perceived as signaling change, stereotypically linked to their gender, or for their perceived agentic qualities as leaders. In contrast, men become crisis leaders due to their perceived agentic change potential.

Introduction

Over the past 50 years the leadership landscape has continuously changed, as have theories on leadership (Dansereau, Seitz, Chiu, Shaughnessy, & Yammarino, 2013). Traditionally, a “think manager – think male” (Schein, 2001) association prevailed which was accompanied by a stronger emergence of male leaders (Eagly & Karau, 1991). Since the beginning of the 21st century, leadership-types that more strongly involve followers, such as “distributed”, “shared” (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007), or “transformational” (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Judge & Piccolo, 2004) leaderships, have been celebrated as the most desired leadership styles (see meta-analysis by Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014). In particular, transformational leadership is typically perceived and reported to be enacted by women (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). Hence, the more positive evaluation of communal or transformational leaders, as compared to the traditional agentic or transactional leaders, has promoted the idea of a “female advantage” in the access to leadership positions (e.g., Eagly & Carli, 2003; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011; Rosette & Tost, 2010; Sargent, 1983). Indeed, although the male-manager stereotype is still alive, it has become less compelling (e.g., Deal & Stevenson, 1998; Hartl, Kirchler, & Muehlbacher, 2013; Sczesny, Bosak, Neff, & Schyns, 2004), and more diverse forms of leadership coexist, holding out a promise of female participation and a real

increase of the number of women joining top leadership ranks. While up to the mid-1990s hardly any top managers were women, in the 2010s in Europe and in the US they respectively made up 3% and 5% of CEOs, 18% and 17% of directors on the boards of the largest companies, and 33% and 42.7% of managerial positions in general (European Commission, 2011, 2014; International Labour Organization, 2015). Although the glass ceiling prevails (Barreto, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2009), leadership spheres have become more diverse. The greater representation of women has led to a change in how leadership is studied (Sczesny, 2005). For example, it has sparked interest in the types of contexts which facilitate the promotion of atypical leaders or leadership styles (e.g., Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). The question of who is a “good leader” has evolved into the question of who is *perceived* to be a good leader in a specific context.

In the present research, we will focus on a crisis context because previous research has suggested that women are particularly apt to be selected as leaders in unstable or precarious situations, compared to flourishing situations (Furst & Reeves, 2008; Jalalzai, 2008; Ryan et al., 2016). The phenomenon that women but also ethnic minorities seem to be particularly favored as leaders when the risk of failure is high was dubbed the “glass cliff” (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). We will extend this research by looking beyond category membership (i.e., gender) of leaders. We combine gender with information on gendered personality characteristics of leaders, and investigate how these combinations

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affect decision-makers' leader choices. In this way, we further elaborate on the boundary conditions of glass cliffs, as well as on the subtle differences in the circumstances that accompany male versus female leader appointments to leadership positions in times of crisis.

Leadership in times of crisis

Since the second part of the 20th century, organizational crises have become an almost routine event in companies (Mishra, 1996), fueling interest in the uncovering of ideal leadership in crisis situations. Crisis management is almost inevitably linked to considerations of changing the management (e.g., Fink, Beak, & Taddeo, 1971). Indeed, moments of crisis have been associated with changes in the leadership concept (Probert & James, 2011). For example, a study in a Japanese context showed that in crisis contexts recruiters were more likely to move away from choosing typical leaders and select outsiders as new leaders (Kaplan & Minton, 1994). As we will outline below, the social psychological literature points towards a non-traditional leadership as an ideal for crisis contexts. In particular, glass-cliff research shows that the social category of women, which is associated with a non-traditional prototype of the leader, is often preferred in times of crisis (Ryan et al., 2016).

The literature on leader selection indicates that atypical individuals, in particular women and members of ethnic minorities, are more likely to be promoted or selected as leaders in precarious situations and to high-risk leadership positions than in more stable, low-risk situations. A number of studies testify to this tendency in various contexts. Archival evidence has shown that women and ethnic minorities are more likely to become directors in the largest US and UK companies following bad performance (e.g., Cook & Glass, 2014; Ryan & Haslam, 2005), following scandals (Brady, Isaacs, Reeves, Burroway, & Reynolds, 2011), and in high-risk organizational situations more generally (Glass & Cook, 2016). Similarly, Black coaches were shown to be more likely to be selected for basketball teams following a history of team losses, compared to White coaches (Cook, 2013). Experimental and archival studies have demonstrated that ethnic minority and female political candidates are more often nominated to run in hard-to-win situations (Kulich, Ryan, & Haslam, 2014; Ryan, Haslam, & Kulich, 2010), and to govern in politically and economically unstable periods (Jalalzai, 2008). In the legal domain, female counsels are more likely to be chosen to handle a difficult high-risk legal case (Ashby, Ryan, & Haslam, 2007).

Implementing change

The search for underlying reasons of glass cliffs has led researchers to investigate if the choice of atypical leaders arises from a motivation to *implement change* in a dysfunctional organizational system. This motivation was already mentioned in early glass-cliff research (Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan, Haslam, & Postmes, 2007). The idea of change as motivator has been supported in an experiment showing that glass cliffs only occur following male management and not following female management (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010). Further support comes from a study showing that women are only preferentially chosen as leaders when the crisis is caused by previous bad management, and change is thus controllable by the company (Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Iacoviello, Faniko, & Ryan, 2015, Study 1). By contrast, when the crisis is a general phenomenon that affects all companies (e.g., a global economic crisis), and is thus not easily controllable, no glass cliff occurs. Although such studies point to a change motivation, the nature of the implied change is not clear.

Indeed, the glass-cliff literature highlights two possible types of change that companies may seek in order to overcome precarious economic situations (Kulich, Iacoviello, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2015). On the one hand, companies may strategically implement a *symbolic* change by hiring an ostensibly non-traditional leader (e.g., Haslam & Ryan, 2008;

Ryan et al., 2016). The objective here is to signal and communicate to the outside (e.g., investors, stakeholders, customers) that the organization is aware of the difficult situation and is taking action to overcome the crisis. Hence, the company expects to regain investors' and clients' trust, which would bask in a better evaluation of the company on the market. In line with this suggestion, Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi et al. (2015, Study 2) found in an experimental study that motivation to signal change accounted for the preference of a female over a male candidate in a crisis context. On the other hand, companies may be willing to implement an *actual* change in the way the company is managed. From this standpoint, women may be considered as particularly suitable because they are deemed to display a non-traditional, communal leadership style, which may help solve the crisis (Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2011). In sum, are glass cliffs a matter of gender (women signaling change by their visibly different appearance), or (also) of gendered traits (feminine traits as effective leadership style to actually change the situation)?

Gender, gendered traits, and crisis management

A compound of research has looked into the relationship between stereotypically feminine leadership styles and crisis management. Generally, women are granted relational skills that are presumably needed to face a crisis (e.g., Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonzky, 1992), and are associated with transformational leadership styles (e.g., Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Guimond, Chatard, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2013), which imply being able to bring about change in followers (Dansereau et al., 2013). In a similar vein, shared leadership, a typically feminine way of leading, reveals a stronger predictor of team effectiveness than hierarchical leadership in change situations (e.g., Pearce & Sims, 2002). Further, field research shows that female leaders, compared to male leaders, indicate that they employ a more democratic, participative, and consensus-seeking decision making, and that they report being better equipped to face a crisis (Mano-Negrin & Sheaffer, 2004). Finally, stereotypes link women to leadership that instigates new ways of doing things, whereas male leaders are seen as guaranteeing stability (Brown, Diekmann, & Schneider, 2011). Collectively, these findings suggest that women may be perceived to be better suited in handling crisis situations, and are thus more likely to be chosen in such contexts. But does "handling" the situation mean that women and communal traits are perceived to have the potential to "effectively" turn around the organization's crisis situation?

A set of experimental studies by Ryan et al. (2011) looked into the association between crisis and communal leadership. The authors asked participants for the *ideal* characteristics of a leader in a poorly and in a strongly performing company, and found that communal characteristics, compared to agentic characteristics, were more robustly associated with an ideal leader, but only in the poorly-performing company. Both characteristics were considered important in a strongly-performing company (Study 2). In the next step (Study 3), the authors manipulated the role that a leader should take in a crisis situation, and found that communal characteristics were considered particularly useful when the leader's mission was to take the responsibility and the blame for the situation, and to manage the company's employees. However, if actual performance improvement was required, both communal and agentic leadership traits were favored to the same extent. Thus, it seems that the "female advantage" pertains to situations where communal traits and a person-oriented leadership style are needed in order to handle blame and deal with employees. Conversely, if the role is to act in order to improve the company performances (i.e., mission of a spokes-person, or someone improving performance), the increased value ascribed to communal characteristics is not observed. Following this idea, Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi et al. (2015, Study 2) asked participants about their motivations to choose a (female or male) candidate in a crisis (vs. non-crisis) context. As in previous studies, the findings revealed that the woman was the preferred leader in a crisis

situation. More interesting, when the woman was chosen in a crisis, it was not because she was perceived to possess good leadership qualifications (be they agentic or communal) that may be effective to change the situation, but because this choice would be a good strategy for a company to signal change to the outside world. However, this research did not investigate the potential perceptions of agentic and communal traits. One can only conjecture that the female candidate was associated with communal traits and a person-oriented leadership style, and that this type of leadership was not perceived to be a useful qualification to turn around the company.

In sum, there is evidence that, first, women and communal traits are considered suitable for leadership roles that involve company internal activities (the management of the company's employees) and passive roles (signaling change, taking the blame; cf. Ryan et al., 2011). And second, the need for direct improvement of the company's performance through effective leadership is not conducive to a preference for communal (over agentic) leadership traits and does not explain the choice of women in crisis situations (Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi, et al., 2015). Although this does not suggest that either agentic or communal traits are preferable in times of crisis, other research suggests that agentic traits should be given priority. Indeed, the literature on turnaround leadership suggests that the most effective leader is unfeminine and rather egoistic, autocratic, assertive, stable, consistent, and not worried about the quality of social relationships in the workplace (Slatter, Lowett, & Barlow, 2011). Thus, it seems that “effective” crisis management with the aim of changing the performance in a first instance is likely associated to agentic traits. From this, we conclude that if women are chosen for their “feminine” or communal traits, it is not because this communality is perceived to be associated to a more effective person-oriented leadership style to turn around the company. And we hypothesize that if given the choice between a leader with communal or traditional agentic traits, the latter would be perceived as more “effective” in a crisis.

The present research

The present studies extend the above outlined research by investigating the change motivations underlying leader appointments in times of crisis when both candidates' gender and their gendered characteristics are known. In classic glass-cliff studies, the only information provided about the candidates was gender, thus forcing participants to base their choices on the candidates' gender, and presumably on the conventional stereotypes associated with the gender category membership. However, gender per se is not very informative of the candidates' actual leadership traits and behaviors, and thus of their potential to solve the crisis. We argue that the selection of a woman, in the absence of any information about her leadership abilities, can only be motivated by the desire to give a *symbolic* signal of change. Thus, glass-cliff choices may be attenuated if information about a candidate's gender is paired with information about his/her personal characteristics and leadership abilities. Ryan et al. (2011, Study 3) showed that communal traits are preferred only if the mission or expected behavior is explicitly said to be passive (taking the responsibility and blame) or internal (managing people). If a leader was being openly sought to impact performance, compared to the other missions, agentic traits were considered as more important. As a consequence, the glass-cliff effect could be eliminated when trait information that helps to infer the type of leadership behavior the leader is likely to enact is given. And in this case a task-oriented strategy may be perceived as a way in which the leader can directly improve, that is change, the performance.

Ryan et al. (2011) placed emphasis on the desirability of gendered traits in general. They did not look specifically at candidates who actually possessed these traits, neither did they ask participants to evaluate candidates whose gender was indicated. At the same time, previous glass-cliff research focused on candidate gender, giving no information on their actual leadership traits. Thus, in the present

research, we aim to combine these two lines of research to examine the impact of gendered traits in the presence of information on candidates' gender. In our studies, we will present information about candidates' traits, allowing participants to go beyond inferences from mere gender and focus on the information relating to the leadership capacities of candidates. Moreover, Ryan et al.'s (2011, Study 3) study on the role of traits' desirability was limited to a crisis context. It was thus not clear if a leadership mission requiring the leader to actually impact on the company's performance (as compared to more passive and internal missions) would produce a preference for agentic traits only in crisis contexts or also in non-crisis contexts. In Study 1, we will compare leadership choices among several candidates either in a crisis or in a non-crisis context. In Studies 2 and 3, we will investigate if a single candidate who varies in gender and gendered traits across experimental conditions is preferentially selected for a crisis or for a non-crisis company.

We predict that candidates' gendered personality traits should impact on candidate choice. In particular, agentic (male and female) candidates, compared to communal ones, are more likely to be appointed as leaders in times of crisis than in non-crisis times. The hypothesized mechanism is that agentic candidates (compared to communal candidates) are perceived to possess a leadership behavior that is more task-oriented than less person-oriented, which conveys the capability to implement change in a crisis (as compared to a non-crisis) company. These predictions were examined in three studies. In Study 1, we presented either a strongly or a poorly performing company, and asked participants to choose one candidate among four candidates: Candidates were either male or female, and they were either higher in agency than in communality, or higher in communality than in agency. In Studies 2 and 3 we presented each participant with one of these four candidates and asked them to choose among a position in a strongly versus a poorly performing company. Our operational hypotheses are presented here:

Hypothesis 1. Participants exposed to a poorly (versus strongly) performing company are more likely to choose an agentic (versus a communal) candidate (Study 1).

In each of the studies, we tested potential mediators of the hypothesized gendered characteristics and company performance relationship. Such test was cumulative across studies. Study 1 focused on the perceived suitability of the agentic vs. communal leadership characteristics:

Hypothesis 2. Agentic (versus communal) candidates will be more likely to be chosen in a poorly performing company than in a strongly performing company because they will be perceived to be more suitable leaders to improve the company performance (see Fig. 1).

Study 2 examined the role of the perceived task-oriented and person-oriented leadership styles of the agentic and communal candidates. Finally, Study 3 added the examination of the potential to implement change of the two leadership styles. The corresponding hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 3. A poorly (versus strongly) performing company will be more likely to be chosen for an agentic (versus communal) candidate because agentic candidates will be perceived as having a more task-than person-oriented leadership style, which in turn implies a higher change potential (see Fig. 1).

Although our hypotheses did not include predictions on candidate gender, we included this variable in all analyses.

Study 1

Study 1 examined H1 and H2. We used participants' choice between agentic and communal candidates as the dependent variable, and examined the mediating role of perceptions of candidates' suitability. The

Hypothesis 2 (Study 1):**Fig. 1.** Main hypotheses. **Hypothesis 3 (Studies 2 and 3):**

main expectation was that agentic candidates would be more likely to be appointed as leaders in times of crisis than in flourishing times because agentic traits are deemed more suitable than communal traits in such circumstances.

Method**Participants**

Participants were a convenient sample of 110 French-speaking professionals in the Geneva area (age: $M = 34.11$ years, $SD = 10.18$) who were recruited by Master students as part of a research seminar. Exactly 50% were women, 28% held managerial positions, and 77% worked fulltime.

Procedure

Participants answered a paper-pencil questionnaire with the following content, displayed in the chronology of the survey. The study design was a 2 (company performance: strong vs. poor; between-participant factor) by 2 (candidate gender: female vs. male; within-participant factor) by 2 (candidate gendered traits: communal vs. agentic; within-participant factor).

Company performance manipulation. Participants read a fictitious article about a Swiss electronic company (see Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi et al., 2015). The article described the company's performance (increasing vs. decreasing) and indicated that the company was searching for a new executive director. Moreover, it stated that "The main duty of the new director will be to implement new strategies in order to respond to the competition of supermarkets [...] that are now selling cheap mobile phones.", thus explicitly demanding improvement of company

performance from the new director (see Appendix A for the full scenario).

Manipulation check. Participants answered the following manipulation check item for performance: "Do you think the situation of this company is" (7-point scale from *very bad* to *very good*).

Candidate manipulation. Participants read short CVs of four candidates. The CVs consisted of the candidate's photo (pretested for perceived attractiveness and intelligence in Kulich, Ryan, & Haslam, 2007) and a description. The descriptions of the candidates indicated analogous information in terms of age, marital status (all of them were married) and their most recent position (which was executive director in Swiss supermarkets of comparable prestige). Candidates only varied in gender (male vs. female) and gendered stereotype dimension (agentic (A) vs. communal (C) characteristics). Each profile contained five traits, of which four were of the same stereotype dimension and the middle one of the other dimension (AACAA vs. CCACC). The different C or A trait was included in order to portray a realistic person who would not be exclusively agentic or communal. In a pretest we asked university students ($N = 23$, age $M = 21.61$, $SD = 2.48$) to evaluate the traits used in the profiles on a 7-point scale ranging from *masculine* to *feminine*. The two communal profiles were: Profile 1: understanding, attentive to the problems of others, able to act rapidly (A), tactful, having a sense of communication; Profile 2: considerate, concerned by the feelings of others, capable to quickly take decisions (A), refined, helpful. The two agentic profiles were: Profile 1: self-confident, determined/resolute, intuitive (C), go-getter, not influenced by one's emotions; Profile 2: determined, decisive, modest (C), assertive, does not get dominated by one's feelings. MANOVA with special contrasts

showed that the two feminine profiles ($F(1,22) = 1.25$, $p = 0.27$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.06$), and the two masculine profiles ($F(1,22) = 1.90$, $p = 0.18$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$) did not differ in feminine/masculine ascriptions, and that the two communal profiles were significantly more feminine (less masculine) than the two agentic profiles, $F(1,22) = 51.84$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.73$.

Candidate suitability. The four candidates were evaluated on their leadership suitability with 6 items (drawn from Haslam & Ryan, 2008; e.g., “This candidate will be a good leader”, “This candidate fits with this position”, and “This candidate has the required competences for this job.” Cronbach $\alpha > 0.86$), on a 7-point scale ranging from *completely disagree* to *completely agree*.

Candidate choice. The main dependent variable consisted of the choice of one of the four candidates for the new executive position.

After the choice, we asked participants to what degree they considered the candidates' personality, gender, and photo in making their choice (7-point scale: *not at all* to *completely*). Finally, participants provided their demographics and were fully debriefed about the purpose of the study.

Results

Manipulation check

ANOVA showed a significant effect of performance on the performance manipulation check item, $F(1,109) = 1956.79$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.95$, testifying that the company in the strong performance condition was perceived as better performing than the company in the poor performance condition ($M_s = 6.35$ and 1.37 , $SD_s = 0.63$ and 0.55 , respectively).

Candidate choice

We performed logistic regressions to examine the effect of company performance (strong = -1 , poor = 1) on the choice of candidates' gender (female = 0 , male = 1), and on the choice of candidates' gendered traits (communal = 0 , agentic = 1). The logistic regression on choice of candidate gender demonstrated that there were no overall differences in the choice of male (49%) and female (51%) candidates, $B = -0.03$, $\chi^2(1, n = 110) = 0.02$, $p = 0.89$, $e^B = 0.97$, and that company performance had no effect on the choice of gender, $B = -0.14$, $\chi^2(1, n = 110) = 0.56$, $p = 0.45$, $e^B = 0.87$. The logistic regression on candidate gendered traits revealed no overall differences in the choice of agentic (52%) and communal (48%) candidates, $B = 0.08$, $\chi^2(1, n = 110) = 0.17$, $p = 0.68$, $e^B = 1.09$. However, in support of H1, the effect of performance was significant, $B = 0.44$, $\chi^2(1, n = 110) = 5.01$, $p = 0.03$, $e^B = 1.55$, showing that the agentic candidates were more likely to be chosen for the company with poor performance (63%) than for the one with strong performance (41%). In the poor condition, the likelihood to choose the agentic candidates (63%) was marginally greater than the likelihood to choose the communal candidates (37%), $B = 0.52$, $\chi^2(1, n = 110) = 3.73$, $p = 0.053$, $e^B = 1.68$.

Candidate suitability

We performed a full-factorial repeated measures ANOVA on suitability ratings, introducing performance as a between-participants factor and candidate gender and candidate gendered traits as within-participant factors. The findings revealed a main effect of gendered traits, $F(1,108) = 8.45$, $p = 0.004$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$. Agentic candidates ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 0.90$) were perceived as more suitable than communal candidates ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.08$). Furthermore, a Performance $\times$ Gendered Traits interaction (see Fig. 2), $F(1,108) = 4.36$, $p = 0.04$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$, showed that, in line with H2, in the poor performance condition, agentic candidates were perceived as more suitable ($M = 5.48$, $SD = 0.95$) than communal candidates ($M = 4.91$,

Fig. 2. Suitability ratings of candidates as a function of candidates' gendered traits and company performance (Study 1). Error bars indicate standard errors.

$SD = 1.21$), $F(1,108) = 13.46$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.11$. Conversely, in the strong performance condition the agentic and the communal candidates were perceived as equally suitable ($M_s = 5.66$ and 5.57 , $SD_s = 0.83$ and 0.79 , respectively), $F(1,108) = 0.31$, $p = 0.58$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$. Moreover, communal candidates were evaluated as less suitable in the poor than in the strong condition, $F(1,108) = 11.06$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$, while no differences emerged for agentic candidates, $F(1,108) = 1.14$, $p = 0.29$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$. No other main effects or interactions were significant, $F_s < 1.05$, $p_s < 0.16$.

Mediational analysis

Using Hayes' (2013) Process Model 4 (10,000 iterations), we tested mediation to investigate if suitability ratings could explain the preference for agentic candidates in the poor performance condition. Every participant rated all four candidates on their suitability. In our hypothesis, we are specifically interested in the role of agentic candidates' suitability as compared to communal candidates' suitability, and if these were predictive of the final director choice. As participants rated all four candidates, their ratings of the preferred candidate were likely done in comparison to the ratings of the candidates they did not choose. Thus, we calculated a difference score: the suitability ratings made of the two agentic candidates minus the suitability ratings made of the two communal candidates, and introduced this difference score as a mediator. This method allows to see if agentic candidates compared to communal candidates were deemed more (or less) suitable, or if both were seen as equally suitable for the position. Treating suitability ratings of agentic and communal candidates as two simultaneous mediators would hide this information.

As expected in H2, poor performance was related to higher suitability ratings of the agentic than the communal candidates (path a: $B = 0.47$, $p = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.02; 0.93]). Moreover, these higher suitability ratings of agentic (compared to communal) candidates were related to a higher likelihood to choose agentic (compared to communal) candidates (path b: $B = 1.80$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [1.01; 2.58]). Finally, the mediational analysis demonstrated that suitability ratings mediated the effect of performance on candidate choice, 95% CI [0.09; 2.17], and reduced it to non-significance (path c': $B = 0.77$, $p = 0.10$, 95% CI [-0.15; 1.70]).

Doing the same analysis using Process Model 4 but introducing suitability ratings of communal and agentic candidates as separate mediators showed that suitability ratings of the communal candidates, $B = 0.65$, 95% CI [0.23; 1.24] mediated the effect of performance on candidate choice, but not ratings of the agentic candidates, $B = -0.14$, 95% CI [-0.44; 0.15].

Participant gender

We did not have hypotheses on participant gender as in the literature on the glass cliff no systematic effects of this variable on the

selection of candidates have been shown (see for an overview Ryan et al., 2016; the only published study showing a participant gender effect is Hunt-Early, 2012). Nevertheless, Ryan et al. (2011) showed an impact of participant gender on the desirability of agentic and communal traits (women preferred communal traits over agentic traits in a crisis context). Thus, we examined the role of participant gender in the present study. We performed moderated mediation (Hayes, 2013, Model 8). We entered as predictor the above described performance effect, while controlling for the effects of participant gender, and the interaction between participant gender and performance. This analysis showed that the suitability mediation was present among female participants (conditional indirect effect: $B = 1.65$, 95% CI [0.42; 3.83]), but not among male participants (conditional indirect effect: $B = 0.01$, 95% CI [−0.98; 1.15]).

Supplementary analyses

Finally, we analyzed participants' judgments of the role of candidates' personality, gender, and photo in their choice in a repeated-measures ANOVA with Helmert contrasts (one opposing personality to candidate gender and photo, and the other opposing gender to photo), including company performance as a between-participants factor. In line with our findings on candidate choice, participants reported that candidate personality had a stronger impact on their choices ($M = 6.35$, $SD = 1.03$) than candidate gender ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.96$) and photo ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.94$), $F(1,108) = 323.83$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.75$. Candidate gender and photo did not differ significantly, $F(1,108) = 1.70$, $p = 0.20$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$. These findings were similar in both company performance conditions ($ps > 0.13$).

Discussion

Study 1 showed that agentic candidates had better chances than communal candidates to be selected for a leadership position in a poorly performing than in a strongly performing company, thus supporting H1. Despite the fact that both agentic and communal candidates were overall perceived as suitable (means above 5 on a 7-point scale), this agentic advantage was accounted for by the relatively higher suitability ratings of the agentic compared to the communal candidates in the poor company condition, which was predicted by H2. It thus seems that agency is more highly valued than communality in times of declining company performance. As shown in the repeated measures analysis and supplementary mediational analysis results, it was mainly the communal candidates that were deemed less suitable for the poor condition than the strong condition. This pattern appeared in particularly strong among female participants. We did not have hypotheses on the impact of participant gender, so we can only be speculative. The existing literature in the organizational and intergroup domains may provide some cues for interpreting this effect. This literature shows that women, and members of minorities more generally, are more mindful of the social parameters that create or sustain group inequalities than are men and members of majorities (Frable, Blackstone, & Scherbaum, 1990; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011; Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2006; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Thus, women probably bore more importance to relevant social information such as candidates' personality. An alternative explanation may be that men as the majority group wanted to avoid any decision linked to social categories of gender and did not want to appear biased; they thus took into account neither candidate gender nor gendered personality traits.

The findings did not show any effects of candidate gender, despite the fact that we applied the same description of the company that was used in previous glass-cliff research which demonstrated a preference for female candidates in poorly-performing companies (Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi et al., 2015). Study 1 showed that gendered ascriptions of communality or agency, rather than gender per se, predict candidate choice when both dimensions are simultaneously presented. As indicated by the supplementary results, it seems that when information

on gendered traits (personality) is made available, participants readily use these cues to make their choices, while not paying attention to gender. One limitation of Study 1 is that the job description explicitly asked for action of the new director to improve the company performance. Thus, choosing agentic rather than communal candidates could have been a response to this demand. In the next two studies, we avoided this potential confound and did not mention the expected role of the new director. In Study 2, we tested if agentic and communal gendered ascriptions are related to perceptions of “masculine” task-oriented vs. “feminine” person-oriented leadership styles, and if these perceptions explain the preference for an agentic candidate in a crisis context.

Study 2

Study 2 first aimed at replicating the finding that agentic candidates are more likely to be chosen in a poorly-performing company than in a strongly-performing company. It then aimed to test whether this is because agentic candidates are perceived to display a more task-oriented and a less person-oriented leadership style (H3). Indeed, following Slatter et al. (2011) and other turnover experts, we conjecture that a task-oriented leadership style is perceived as more appropriate in dealing with an economic crisis. According to this recent research, in a first reaction the crisis needs to be managed in an authoritarian way, which may include behaviors such as restructuring and imposing changes on people. Only at a later stage a greater emphasis is put on behaviors that focus on people and relations in order to manage the restructured company. Study 2 thus tested if the candidates described as possessing agentic traits are preferred because they are perceived to be task-oriented leaders. Although these two concepts (gendered traits and leadership style) are strongly related, their operationalization is different. We manipulate the gendered traits and tell thereby participants what the candidates are like. We then proceed to asking participants for their own opinion about the candidates' expected leadership styles. Such a measure of leadership style as a mediator is important because it allows to examine how gender and gendered traits drive perceptions of a candidate's leadership behavior. In this vein, we want to ascertain that gendered traits are more predictive of leadership style perceptions than gender per se. If maleness alone is associated to task-orientation, then male candidates should always be preferred to female candidates in crisis contexts, independent of the nature of their traits. In contrast, if maleness and agency predict crisis choices, then any man and any agentic candidate (female or male) should be chosen. However, if as we argue, agency is the dominant predictor, crisis choice should solely depend on the candidate's gendered traits.

In the present study, we took a different approach from typical glass-cliff experiments by manipulating candidates' gender and gendered characteristics as between-participants variables, and by assessing the type of company (strongly vs. poorly performing) that the candidate was chosen for. Our aim was to examine if participants would make similar choices as in Study 1 if they only saw one candidate instead of all four at the same time. Research has shown that presenting candidates of different gender simultaneously leads to less stereotyping than if such evaluations are made between evaluators (Bohnet, van Geen, & Bazerman, 2012), presumably because of social desirability concerns. Study 2 was designed to address a further potential limitation of Study 1, in which we explicitly mentioned the role of the new director (improve the performance). Thus, participants might have simply acted consistently with these instructions by appointing an agentic leader for an agentic role. Indeed, Gartzia, Ryan, Balluerka, and Aritzeta (2012) found that after presentation of an instrumental role model, participants did not prefer a woman over a man in a crisis context. In this research candidates' traits were not manipulated so no comparison of the separate impact of gender and gendered traits could be made. In order to rule out a leader-trait – leader-role consistency effect, Study 2 did not provide information on leadership role

expectations. The “romance of leadership” literature (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985) shows that people tend towards internal attributions as they infer from company performance on managers' capacities. This association may also go the other way, namely that people implicitly assume that a director is hired *because* s/he is expected to impact on performance (in positive ways). Moreover, we applied a full glass-cliff experimental design, presenting crisis and non-crisis contexts (Gartzia et al.'s, 2012 studies presented only crisis contexts). A final change in comparison to Study 1 consisted in the use of a different sampling method and population: We examined our hypotheses using MTurk participants who are US professionals.

Method

Participants

Participants were 137 MTurk workers (age: $M = 35.61$, $SD = 12.32$) of US nationality with work experience (68 were female, 65 male, 4 did not indicate their gender). Sixty-four percent were White, 10% African American, 7% Asian American, 13% Hispanic/Latino, and 2% Native American. Thirty-three percent indicated to hold a managerial position, 62% were employed, 12% self-employed, 15% unemployed, and 4% students. The remaining percentage of participants did not indicate such information. Nineteen percent of participants reported to earn “less than \$10,000”, 7.3% “between 10,001 and \$15,000”, 6.6% “between \$15,001 and \$20,000”, 10.2% “between \$20,001 and \$25,000”, 8.8% “between \$25,001 and \$30,000”, 5.1% “between \$30,001 and \$35,000”, 7.3% “between \$35,001 and \$40,000”, 5.8% “between \$40,001 and \$45,000”, 2.9% “between \$45,001 and \$50,000”, 5.1% “between \$50,001 and \$55,000”, and 19.7% “more than \$55,000” per year.

Procedure

Participants answered an online survey with the following content, displayed in the chronology of the survey.

Company performance. Participants read two fictitious articles about two companies' performances (see Appendix B). One company had a strong stock performance (“... the trading value of its stocks listed on the New York Stock Exchange has been steadily going up. According to experts, management played an important role for this growth”), and the other company had a poor stock-performance (“... it has experienced a steady drop in its financial performance. This can be seen in the trading value of its stocks listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Experts hold bad management responsible for this drop”). Both articles ended with the information that the company was looking to fill a vacant position after the impending retirement of the CEO. The articles were accompanied by a graph illustrating the increasing or the declining curb for stock prices. Contrary to Study 1, we did not include an explicit reference to the director's mission (improving company performance).

Manipulation check performance. Participants were asked to indicate which company had fared better according to the information provided in the article. From the main analyses, we excluded 5 participants who incorrectly answered this question.

Manipulation of candidate profiles. Next, participants were presented with one out of four candidate profiles. We manipulated candidates' gender (male vs. female) and gendered traits (agentic vs. communal) resulting in four experimental conditions. This was done by presenting a short CV of a male or a female candidate indicating his/her professional experiences and personal details such as age, nationality, and address. The gendered traits information was introduced by presenting a graphical summary of the results of a personality assessment made by a headhunter. Ratings of agentic (e.g., self-confident, determined) and communal (e.g., intuitive, tactful) traits

were opposed, so that participants learned about either a highly agentic and lowly communal profile or a lowly agentic and highly communal profile. A pretest using MTurk participants ($N = 32$ workers, age $M = 40.19$, $SD = 13.95$) ascertained that the agentic traits were perceived as significantly more masculine (and less feminine), $t(31) = 6.35$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 2.01$; $M_s = 4.61$ vs. 2.96 , $SD_s = 0.73$ vs. 0.90 , and as more task-oriented (and less person-oriented), $t(31) = 6.91$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.57$; $M_s = 4.96$ vs. 3.04 , $SD_s = 0.92$ vs. 1.46 , than the communal traits.

Perceived leadership style. The candidate's perceived leadership style was assessed through 4 person-oriented (“has interpersonal skills”, “has conflict solving ability”, “is sensitive to the needs of employees”, “has a person-oriented leadership style”, $\alpha = 0.84$) and 3 task-oriented (“is capable to give clear directions”, “has authority”, “has a task-oriented leadership style”, $\alpha = 0.74$) leadership behaviors.

Company choice. On the next page, participants chose for which of the two companies the candidate should be recommended.

Finally, participants provided their demographics, and were presented with a text explaining the goals of the survey.

Results

The main effect of participant gender and all possible interactions with candidate gender and candidate traits were added to the below analyses but did not have any significant impact (all $p_s \geq 0.10$). We thus report the analyses without including participant gender.

Company choice

We performed a logistic regression in order to examine the impact of candidate gender ($-1 = \text{female}$, $1 = \text{male}$), candidate gendered traits ($-1 = \text{communal}$, $1 = \text{agentic}$), and their interaction, on choice of company (strong = 0, poor = 1). The only significant effect was that of gendered traits, $B = 0.81$, $\chi^2(1, n = 132) = 17.17$, $p = 0.001$, $e^B = 2.24$, such that the probability to choose the agentic candidate for the poor company was higher than for the strong company (74% and 37%, respectively). Neither candidate gender, $B = 0.04$, $\chi^2(1, n = 132) = 0.05$, $p = 0.83$, $e^B = 1.04$, nor its interaction with candidate gendered traits reached significance, $B = -0.32$, $\chi^2(1, n = 132) = 2.78$, $p = 0.10$, $e^B = 0.72$.

Perceived leadership style

We performed a full-factorial repeated measures ANOVA on the leadership style ratings with candidate gender and candidate gendered traits as between-participants variables, and leadership style (task-oriented vs. person-oriented) as a within-participant variable. The analysis first showed a main effect of leadership style, $F(1,128) = 8.78$, $p = 0.004$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.06$. The candidates were generally rated as more task-oriented ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.07$) than person-oriented ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.29$). This main effect was qualified by an interaction with candidate gendered traits, $F(1,128) = 107.41$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.46$. In accord with our premises, pairwise comparisons (see Fig. 3, left panel) revealed that the agentic candidates were perceived as more task-oriented than the communal ones, $F(1,128) = 13.27$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$, and that the communal candidates were perceived as more person-oriented than the agentic ones, $F(1,128) = 84.40$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.39$. Moreover, the agentic candidates were perceived as more task-oriented than person-oriented, $F(1,128) = 85.86$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.40$, and the communal candidates as more person-oriented than task-oriented, $F(1,128) = 28.36$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.18$. No other effects reached significance.

Mediational analysis

Using Hayes' (2013) Process Model 4 (10,000 iterations), we calculated multiple mediation whereby a difference score of task- minus

Fig. 3. Leadership style ratings of candidates as a function of candidates' gendered traits in Studies 2 and 3. Error bars indicate standard errors.

person-oriented leadership styles was introduced as mediator of the relationship between candidate gendered traits (communal vs. agentic) and choice of company (strong vs. poor). Candidate gender and the interaction of candidate gender and gendered traits were controlled for. Mediation analysis revealed that candidate gendered traits predicted leadership style (path a: $B = 1.13$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.92; 1.35]). Moreover, leadership style positively predicted company choice (path b: $B = 1.00$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.54; 1.47]) such that a more task- than person-oriented leadership style led to the choice of the poorly performing company. Leadership style was a significant mediator, 95% CI [0.58; 1.88], reducing the effect of candidate gendered traits on company choice to non-significance (path c': $B = -0.10$, $p = 0.71$, 95% CI [-0.65; 0.44]). This supported the first part of H3 which stated that agentic candidates (compared to communal candidates) should be perceived to possess a more task-oriented than person-oriented leadership style, accounting for their preference in poorly performing companies.

Calculating the same model with the two leadership styles as multiple mediators indicated that both task-orientation (95% CI [0.13; 0.66]) and person-orientation (95% CI [0.29; 1.45]) acted as significant mediators. All other models, using candidate gender and the interaction of gender and gendered traits as predictors, revealed non-significant.

Discussion

Study 2 corroborated the findings from Study 1 by showing that the agentic candidates were more likely to be paired with the poorly- than the strongly-performing company. In addition, in accordance with H3, the findings showed that perceived leadership behavior explained agentic candidates' greater success rates in the poorly-performing company compared to communal candidates and compared to the strong performance context. Thus, task-orientation was clearly perceived as more effective behavior than person-orientation. This suggests that, at least in early stages of a turnaround, task-oriented leadership style is important for turnaround experts (see Slatyer et al., 2011). However, both leadership-style scores reached almost 5 and above which indicates that both styles were perceived somewhat positively. This joins the result from Study 1 on suitability ratings. Of importance, there were no effects of candidate gender, thus agentic and communal ascriptions had a similar impact on male and female candidates' likelihood to be chosen in poorly- or strongly-performing company contexts.

In addition, it is interesting to note that although in the present study the director's mission was not explicitly stated to be about performance improvement, we found the same pattern as in the preceding study (i.e., preference of an agentic compared to a communal candidate in a poorly-performing company). This suggests that participants implicitly assumed that the company sought for a director who could improve the performance. Moreover, such an effect did not occur in a

non-crisis context, thus agentic traits seem to be deemed more important in a crisis than in a non-crisis context.

Study 3

In Study 3, we tested H3 which predicted that candidates' agency and task-orientation were associated to the perception of a potential to change the situation, which in turn would lead to a preference for agentic candidates in crisis contexts. We thus replicated and extended Study 2 by adding measures of perceived change potential.

Method

Participants

Participants were 213 MTurk participants who are US citizens with work experience (age: $M = 36.40$, $SD = 12.60$), of which 89 were female and 124 male. Seventy percent were White, 10% African American, 6% Asian American, 10% Hispanic/Latino, and 2% Native American. Forty-seven percent indicated to hold a managerial position, 74% were employed, 16% self-employed, 8% unemployed, and 3% students. The remaining percentages of participants did not indicate this information. Thirteen percent of participants reported to earn "less than \$10,000", 9.9% "between 10,001 and \$15,000", 7.0% "between \$15,001 and \$20,000", 8.0% "between \$20,001 and \$25,000", 8.5% "between \$25,001 and \$30,000", 8.0% "between \$30,001 and \$35,000", 11.7% "between \$35,001 and \$40,000", 5.2% "between \$40,001 and \$45,000", 4.7% "between \$45,001 and \$50,000", 5.6% "between \$50,001 and \$55,000", and 18.3% "more than \$55,000" per year.

Procedure

The design was the same as in Study 2. Participants learned about a strongly- and a poorly-performing company and about an agentic or a communal candidate profile. Six participants did not respond correctly to the manipulation check about the company performance, and were thus excluded from all analyses. We measured perceptions of candidates' leadership styles (task-oriented: $\alpha = 0.69$; person-oriented: $\alpha = 0.85$) and we calculated the difference between the means of the two scales. We then asked participants to choose a company and evaluate the candidate's potential to implement actual change and to signal change. Finally, participants provided their demographics, and were debriefed.

Potential for change. We used two sets of items measuring change. Three items measured symbolic change: "This candidate is capable of changing the company's position on the market.", "Choosing this candidate as CEO for the company symbolizes the start of a new era", and "The choice of this candidate signals to investors that the company is willing to substantially change things" ($\alpha = 0.87$). The other three

items measured actual change: “This candidate will do things differently than the routine way of leading”, “This candidate is likely to keep the company going on the same track as it was before (reverse coded)”, and “This candidate’s ways of leading will be consistent with how things have always been done before (reverse coded)” ($\alpha = 0.81$). Although conceptually different (see Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi et al., 2015), the two indices were highly correlated, $r = 0.70$, $p < 0.001$, and were thus collapsed into one index in the final analysis ($\alpha = 0.89$).

Results

As for the former study, the main effect of participant gender and all possible interactions with candidate gender and candidate traits did not have any significant impact ($ps > 0.08$). Participant gender was thus excluded from all analyses.

Candidate choice

Logistic regression on company choice (0 = strong, 1 = poor) revealed that candidate gendered traits had a significant impact on company choice, $B = 0.98$, $\chi^2(1, n = 207) = 37.27$, $p < 0.001$, $e^B = 2.67$. As in Study 2, the agentic candidates were more likely to be chosen for the poorly (76%) than for the strongly (23%) performing company. In addition, there was an effect of candidate gender, $B = 0.35$, $\chi^2(1, n = 207) = 4.69$, $p = 0.03$, $e^B = 1.42$, such that the probability to choose a man was greater (63%) in the poor than in the strong (37%) condition. The two-way interaction was not significant, $B = 0.13$, $\chi^2(1, n = 207) = 0.69$, $p = 0.41$, $e^B = 1.14$.

Perceived leadership style

A repeated measures ANOVA showed a main effect of leadership style, $F(1,203) = 14.13$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$. This main effect was further qualified by an interaction with candidate gendered traits, $F(1,203) = 248.87$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.55$, pointing in the same direction as in Study 2 (see Fig. 3, right panel).

Change potential

ANOVA revealed that only candidate gendered traits had a significant effect on change potential, $F(1,203) = 82.63$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.29$. Agentic candidates were more strongly associated to change ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.07$) than communal candidates ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.15$).

Mediational analysis

Using Hayes’ (2013) Process Model 6 (10,000 iterations) we calculated serial mediation whereby we analyzed the indirect effect of candidate gendered traits through leadership style (task- minus person-orientation) and change potential on company choice (see Fig. 4). Candidate gendered traits predicted leadership style, $B = 1.19$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [1.04; 1.34] and change potential, $B = 0.35$, $p = 0.002$, 95% CI [0.13; 0.57]. Leadership style also was related to change potential, $B = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.16; 0.43]. Company choice was only predicted by change potential, $B = 2.48$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [1.72; 3.24]. The indirect path whereby candidate gendered traits predicted company choice through leadership style and change potential was significant, $B = 0.87$, 95% CI [0.40; 1.36]. Thus, the serial mediation as predicted in H3 was supported. Moreover, the indirect path of candidate gendered traits through potential change only was also significant, $B = 0.87$, 95% CI [0.32; 1.44]. These findings show that leadership style is a mediator but, when potential of change is added, this direct effect on performance disappears and becomes an indirect effect through change potential.

Calculating the model separately for the subsets of signal of change items and of actual change items produced similar results. Calculating Model 4, as in Study 2, showed that both task- (95% CI [0.07; 0.43]) and person-orientation (95% CI [0.06; 0.71]) were significant mediators of the relation between candidate gender and company choice.

Calculating two separate serial mediation models (Model 6) with each of the two leadership styles as single mediators indicated that task-orientation is a significant mediator (95% CI [0.16; 0.64]), but not person-orientation (95% CI [−0.20; 0.50]) which was not predictive of a potential to change ($B = -0.07$, $p = -0.29$).

Discussion

The last study replicated findings from Study 2 and yielded the additional information that agentic candidates are not only perceived to possess a more task-oriented leadership style, but that this form of leadership is associated with the potential to implement change, thus supporting H3. This suggests that it is because of their capacities to implement change that agentic leaders are preferentially chosen in a troubled company. This is in line with what the managerial literature says about turnaround managers, who should be rather assertive and autocratic in their leadership during the initial attempts to solve a crisis. Moreover, the findings revealed that change potential calls for both symbolic and actual change. Indeed, according to this same literature, turnaround leaders need to manage financial aspects (thus actual change), as well as stakeholders’ confidence in the company (Slatter et al., 2011), a dimension linked to signaling change.

This study also revealed that men were more likely to be chosen in poorly performing companies. However, as this effect did not occur in the other two studies, and it is only about half the size of the effect of gendered traits, it should not be over-interpreted.

General discussion

Three experimental studies with working populations in Europe and in the US illustrated that agentic leaders are given priority in crisis situations. Providing information on the type of leadership competences of the candidates rendered information on gender less relevant for recruitment decisions. This finding complements past findings on the glass cliff which indicate that women are more likely than men to be chosen in crisis contexts (e.g., Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan et al., 2011). However, in these past studies no information other than gender varied, so it appears that adding information on gendered traits, as was done in the present research, may attenuate this glass-cliff effect. Moreover, Study 1 provided evidence that a lack of communal traits, paired with agentic competences, explained the agentic candidates’ higher likelihood of being selected in the crisis situation. Study 2 contributed to this idea by showing that task-oriented rather than person-oriented leadership competences produced a preference for the agentic leader in the crisis situation. Finally, Study 3 produced evidence of a link between stronger task-orientation than person-orientation and perceived change potential. This accounted for the preference for an agentic candidate in a crisis situation. This set of studies extends previous findings that showed that if a woman is preferred in times of crisis it is for her signaling change potential and not for her actual qualifications as a leader (Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi et al., 2015). In the present studies, we added to this knowledge by showing that if a real change potential is made implicitly available through information on candidates’ actual traits, then people will tend to choose agentic candidates who convey both the potential to actually change the way the company is being led (actual change) and to improve the way the company is being viewed (signal of change). This fits nicely with descriptions of the ideal leader in the turnaround literature (Slatter et al., 2011).

Although the literature on leadership shows that communal leadership styles fulfill a useful role in crisis contexts, the present studies show that agentic leadership styles and their orientation on tasks are still perceived as most efficient for directly increasing company performance. Indeed, Slatter et al. (2011) mention that in the early stage of the turnaround process agentic leadership is crucial, and only in a latter phase of “crisis stabilization” does people management become more important, though it often goes hand in hand with a new change in

Fig. 4. Serial mediation (Study 3).

Note. Candidates with agentic (vs. communal) traits were perceived as having a more task-oriented (than person-oriented) leadership style, and in turn as having a potential to change, and subsequently were more likely to be chosen for the poor (vs. strong) company. These serially mediated indirect effects were statistically significant. Candidate gender and its interaction with candidates' traits were controlled for. Numbers are unstandardized coefficients. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

leadership. Hence, communal leadership may have been deemed as less suitable for crisis management in the present studies because person-orientation only becomes an effective strategy after the large hurdles of restructuring and financial turnaround have been dealt with in an autocratic and uncompromising way.

Contributions to theory

There is an increasing compound of the literature on gender and leadership that is sensitive to the value of female and male leadership and leadership styles. A simple think male-think manager association cannot be considered true for all managerial contexts anymore (e.g., Eagly & Carli, 2003; Koenig et al., 2011; Rosette & Tost, 2010; Ryan et al., 2011; Sargent, 1983; Sczesny et al., 2004; Slatter et al., 2011). The present research inserts in this growing literature that investigates the preference for more agentic or more communal, more task- or person-orientated styles in different leadership contexts. Sometimes findings may appear contradictory as women are still underrepresented leaders but at the same time a “female advantage” or “androgynous leadership” has been celebrated. The glass-cliff literature points towards a clear advantage for women in precarious leadership situations as compared to less precarious ones (Ryan et al., 2016). Although past research suggests that crisis brings about a demand for female leaders, this may depend on the context in which selections are being done. Gender by itself may prioritize female selection and gendered traits may be deemed useful in certain crisis context implying missions that do not focus on an active change of performance by the manager (e.g., Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi et al., 2015; Ryan et al., 2011). However, little was known so far on the combination of gender and gendered traits in crisis contexts. The present studies extend the glass-cliff literature as they suggest that crisis may demand agentic, task-oriented leadership, which may be enacted by a man or a woman. But more importantly, they also add to the literature by uncovering mechanisms that account for this preference. Glass-cliff studies have previously shown that women may be considered good leaders in a crisis because a company can use them for image-lifting purposes (Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi et al., 2015). The present research showed that when change is perceived to be not so much about image-lifting but about real observable change in the form of actions oriented to the

financial outcomes, personality traits and leadership styles may be better predictors for leadership choices than gender. Of course, such findings add complexity to the literature on leadership and gender more generally, as they indicate that gender categories in isolation have some impact but that in certain contexts additional information such as gendered characteristics may override gender effects (see also Kulich & Ryan, 2017).

Practical implications

Although some may celebrate women's access to particularly demanding crisis positions as a progress in gender equality, the numbers obscure the nature of such hiring decisions in managerial positions. Some women end up in glass-cliff positions because companies only use their gender category membership as a “window-dressing” strategy to signal change (Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi et al., 2015). However, some women may be hired for their (agentic) leadership qualities. As the present research shows, men and women equipped with agentic qualities are equally likely to become crisis leaders. Women are thus confronted with ambiguity regarding the reasons for which they became leaders: Is their selection an instrumental means to signal change, or was the company attracted by their actual leadership qualities? According to the present research and to Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi et al.'s (2015) findings the message is clearer for men: If men are selected it is for their leadership potential. Past research on pay inequalities has similarly alluded to the fact that women in leadership or other highly qualified positions may be labeled as leaders, but not necessarily perceived as being competent or as agents of company performance (see for leaders: Kulich et al., 2007; Kulich, Trojanowski, Ryan, Haslam, & Renneboog, 2011; see for medical doctors: Evers & Sieverding, 2014).

Appointing women to leadership positions where it is unclear whether their selection was a consequence of their value as leaders, may have detrimental implications for women. If women themselves become aware that they may only be occupying a leadership position for reasons of signaling change, their work may be undermined. Interviews with women in glass-cliff positions and archival research by Glass and Cook (2016) indeed suggest that women feel that they have to prove themselves and that other managers and clients fail to

acknowledge their role as leaders. As previous research has shown, people tend to view female managers first as women and then as leaders (Scott & Brown, 2006). If employees and colleagues think that a female leader may only be in the position for symbolic reasons, this may also dispute women's power, and lead to their being more closely scrutinized. Thus, even competent women may start to question their own abilities. Such situations of uncertainty about one's competences and the value given by the organization are likely to cause stress, damage well-being, and lead to high turnover (Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, Kulich, & Atkins, 2007; Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, Kulich, & Wilson-Kovacs, 2009; Sabharwal, 2015). Women's identification with the organization may be affected as trust cannot be established in an ambiguous relationship, and organizational disidentification is known to be linked to higher turnover (Van Dick et al., 2004).

By contrast, agentic women chosen as leaders may also suffer from these appointments but in a different way because they may be subjected to backlash reactions. As the literature shows, agentic women may be perceived as competent but not likable or sympathetic which in turn may have an impact on social support but also undermines promotions of such women (Rudman & Glick, 2001), although more recent research gives hope that this may not always be the case (Bosak, Kulich, Rudman, & Kinahan, in press).

Limitations and future research

Our research sought to disentangle the impact of candidates' gender and gendered traits on leader selection in crisis, when both criteria are available. In Study 1 we presented candidates who were described by one or the other gendered dimensions (agency or communality). In Studies 2–3 we presented profiles that were higher in one than the other dimension. This procedure allowed us to compare the unique impact of each dimension. In parallel, other studies have explored the joint occurrence of these two dimensions. Indeed, work on leadership styles suggests that the ideal manager, at least in a successful company setting, may be an androgynous person, that is, someone who is high in both dimensions (e.g., Koenig et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2011, Study 2). In line with this, research has pointed to the fact that both task-oriented and person-oriented leadership styles are effective (see a meta-analysis by Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Pearce & Sims, 2002). For example, the change management literature emphasizes that managing a crisis means both managing the crisis itself and improving communication (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Therefore, the question should not only be if agentic or communal traits are better suited for leadership, but also if being characterized by both kinds of traits may be considered better than being characterized by only one (Powell & Butterfield, 1979; Sargent, 1983). As women are perceived to be more strongly associated with communal traits and men with agentic traits, the present set of studies may provide some initial clues. Considering an androgynous ideal of leadership, one might have expected that communal men and agentic women would come close to the androgyny concept. But our findings did not reveal an interaction of candidates' gender and gendered traits. Future research may thus investigate androgynous profiles more straightforwardly, and their perceived effectiveness for both genders in different performance contexts. Moreover, crisis is not a narrowly defined condition; many types of crises exist and they are likely to require different types of leadership (Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, & Cavarretta, 2009; Pearson & Clair, 1998).

The present research was experimental in nature. This comes with ecological limitations, as participants are asked to evaluate and react to fictitious situations, and information about candidates and companies is by necessity limited and detached from the larger environmental context. Future research should analyze the interaction of gender and

gendered traits in the context of company performance in more naturalistic settings. Other variables that were controlled for in this experimental setting (e.g., the impact of candidate gestures and behavior in recruitment interviews, the size and type of companies, the type of crisis) may impact on candidate selection and may produce a more nuanced pattern of outcomes.

Finally, the sampling strategies should be taken into consideration in the interpretation of the results and before generalization to broader contexts. Study 1 used a convenient sample of professionals, which may have suffered from some uncontrollable selection biases as participants were recruited through students' social networks (e.g., parents, relatives, and friends). In Switzerland, access to university is less restricted than in other countries, as tuition fees are very low and the only access-condition is to have an A-level qualification. Students thus come from a variety of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, although biases in favor of more highly educated and middle class family backgrounds exists. The advantage of this sampling strategy is that we were able to access professionals from a variety of companies, and moreover to get responses from people who might not normally participate in research but may have done so in order to help out the student. Studies 2 and 3 used MTurk workers and research has shown that MTurk samples are a valid and reliable source of data collection (e.g., Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). It is important to note that in the study introduction, we made sure to specify that the research was about candidate selection in a company and did not inform participants that this study was on gender in order to prevent self-selection biases in this respect. All MTurkers who started the survey finished it. The socio-demographic information (ethnicity, age, etc.) shows that these samples correspond to the US population and to the type of distribution one receives when questioning professional samples. So we believe that the population should be representative of the US working population. Overall, it is convincing that we find consistent effects with two different sampling strategies and across two different cultural contexts.

Conclusions

Leadership ideals and leadership choices are a consequence of a complex interplay of the precariousness of the context (crisis vs. stability; e.g., Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi et al., 2015), the availability of information on candidates' characteristics (gender, Haslam & Ryan, 2008; or gender in combination with gendered leadership characteristics, see present studies), and the type of role a leader is expected to play. Several of these factors are related to change intentions, but in different ways. Women may be preferred leaders in times of crisis but not for the same reasons as men. Women in general will be chosen for their symbolic value to signal change (Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi et al., 2015). However, if female gender is paired with information on leadership traits, agentic women will be preferred over communal women (and men) in crisis contexts because they are perceived to be more suitable leaders and better able to implement real change. In contrast, men can be more confident that if they are chosen as leaders in crisis contexts, it is for their presumed agentic leadership capacities, and that they are not being "used" strategically to signal change.

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Appendix A

Study 1: scenario for a poorly [strongly] performing company (translation from French). In additions graphs as in Studies 2 and 3 were presented.
Electronic company in difficulty [on the rise] -LPG appoints an executive director (h/f)

LPG - Geneva, specialized in electronics, looks for a new executive director (h/f). Since the first trimester 2011, the company suffers from large difficulties [has seen a big development] because of the bad [good] management of the board of directors. This bad [good] management has a negative [positive] impact on the benefits and sales of LPG.

LPG, specialist of mobile phones, announces a decrease [increase] in the commands of 25% for this year.

The main duty of the new director will be to implement new strategies in order to respond to the competition of supermarkets such as Lidl and Aldi that are now selling cheap mobile phones.

Appendix B

Studies 2 and 3: scenario for companies. Company names (Jefferson and Morton) were alternated for the poorly and strongly performing companies, in order to control for potential effects linked to the name.

Poorly performing company

Going Down... Jefferson's Disastrous Stock Performance

By Alex Roger

NEW YORK: Although the past decade has seen considerable expansion in Jefferson's worldwide markets, over this time it has experienced a steady drop in its financial performance. This can be seen in the trading value of its stocks listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Experts hold bad management responsible for this drop. Due to the retirement of the former CEO B. Fawn, Jefferson is currently looking to fill this vacant position.

Jefferson's Declining Decade

Strongly performing company

From Strength to Strength – Morton's Outstanding Stock Performance

By Chris Harris

NEW YORK: Over the past 10 years Morton has considerably grown on national and international markets. This is reflected in its financial performance. The trading value of its stocks listed on the New York Stock Exchange has been steadily going up. According to experts, management played an important role for this growth. Now, Morton is looking for a new CEO after the retirement of H. Smith.

Morton's Developing Decade

Appendix C

Studies 2 and 3: introductory text and manipulation of candidate description (for the female version was “Claire Jones”):

A headhunter company has been asked to make a selection of potential candidates for these high-profile positions. The headhunter's usual selection procedure includes the study of the company's situation, potential candidates' CVs, their performances in recent positions, as well as an internal assessment scheme where they determine the fit between candidates' personality and the requirements of potential positions.

ALAN JONES – CURRICULUM VITAE

Summary:

Alan Jones has held a number of senior management positions within the banking sector and is currently CEO of the LPG Financial. Alan Jones obtained his MBA at the Harvard Business School and has recently published a series of papers reporting the successful implementation of financial and operation strategies within the corporate sector. He is an Advisory Council member of US Financial Markets Association.

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Studies 2 and 3: Manipulation of candidate's traits:

Among the materials collected by the headhunter, is the psychological personality assessment of the candidate, which reveals the following profile:

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