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# Gender, place attachment and the leadership of cities and regions in transition

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# Introduction

- Impacted communities have been surveyed about their views on their leaders, but the leaders have not
- 15.2% of community members: leaders handled the transition ‘very well’ or ‘extremely well’
- Most community members lost trust in their leaders during the transition
- Government fared particularly poorly  
(Beer et al., 2023)
- ***But how was this perceived by the place leaders?***



# Methodology

- In-depth, semi-structured interviews with place leaders:  
South Australia (8)  
Victoria (6)
- Formal and informal leaders
- Male = 11  
Female = 3



# Key findings

- Place leaders use various techniques to enhance effectiveness during time of shock
- Place leaders' perceptions of their communities are nuanced, fragile and generally more positive than community members' perceptions





## Enhancing effectiveness in place leadership

- Place attachment
- Gendered leadership lens
- Boundary spanning and super silos
- Fragile and divergent narratives



# Place attachment

**‘Place leadership is shaped by place attachment processes.’**  
(Grocke et al., 2022)

Being of place (Grocke et al., 2022)

- Place identity  
*‘I grew up in Salisbury.’*
- Place interaction  
*‘I remember going with my dad to those big picnic days.’*
- Place realisation  
*‘My first car was a Holden Commodore.’*







## Place attachment – key takeaway

***Bridging the gap between people and systems***

***Using social capital to secure benefits***

*(Manzo and Perkins, 2006)*



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# Gendered leadership lens

**‘Women cannot be effective unless others accept their leadership.’  
(Rhode, 2017)**

- Women more democratic/participatory than autocratic/directive (Eagly and Johnson, 1990)
- Described male leadership as ‘ego driven’ ‘patch protection’  
*‘Women lead by committee and by consensus, and men lead by dictatorship.’*
- ‘Old versus new’, not always gendered:  
*‘I do think it's gendered. But in saying that, I think it's also the leadership style that's increasingly coming through in places like start-up thinking.’*
- Male dominated environments = additional difficulties:  
*‘There is definitely some gendered difference in how funding for economic development is given out.’*





# Gendered leadership – key takeaway

*Gender as impediment and asset*



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# Boundary spanning and super silos

**‘Difficult problems invite new ways of working and thinking.’  
(Williams, 2002)**

- COVID-19 presented opportunities for creative problem solving  
*‘Every single business changed their business plan. If they wanted to survive, they had to.’*
- Collaboration and communication increased; super silos emerged  
*‘It’s forced collaboration across council teams, at sort of an unprecedented rate.’*
- State and federal politicians  
*‘In a place like Elizabeth you’re a kind of a conduit for everybody, you’re a link so that you can link people up.’*





## Boundary spanning and super silos – key takeaway

*Enhanced status quo rather than  
radical shift*



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# Fragile and divergent narratives

**‘Personal narratives serve as representations of the roles people play.’  
(Shaw, 1997)**

- Degrees of positivity varied by leader type
- The ‘ideal’ and the ‘ought’ (Shaw, 1997)
- *All* leaders recognised divergent narratives – their dominant narrative was fragile







## Fragile and divergent narratives – key takeaway

*Leaders presented a narrative that was acceptable within the context of the structural forces of their leadership role*





# Summary

- Place leaders use complex mechanisms to enhance effectiveness during times of shock
- Place leaders see their communities differently than community members, but do accept various narrative versions of events



# Policy impacts

- Impacts and outcomes: leaders' views are not representative of the wider community
- 'Scratch the surface' of preferred narratives
- When supporting place leaders to transform communities:
  - Look for the leaders who are innovating and taking risks
  - Support diverse leaders
  - Support leaders with strong social capital



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