

# Why romanticizing leaders as heroes is dangerous

*from the Warwick Business School*

Romanticized leadership can be thought of as the tendency to over-attribute both organizational success and failure to a leader, even if they don't deserve it.

Academics believe we make these unconscious ascriptions to simplify the complex factors involved in significant organizational outcomes. As a result, we view the leader as the driving force behind everything that happens to an organization during their tenure.

The notion of the hero has had an enduring influence in leadership theory and practice, particularly in the U.S., where this way of thinking resonates strongly with the dominant culture of individualism.

"Romanticizing leadership is bewitching because it offers an account of leadership drenched with imprecise mystique. It asks that we view leaders as privileged, holding a transcendent position above the fray of political or historical critique," said [Keith Grint](#), Professor of Public Leadership & Management at [Warwick Business School](#), who conducted a study of the matter along with David Collinson, of Lancaster University, and Owain Smolovic Jones, of The Open University.

When success or failure occurs, these romanticized leaders—who tend to possess strong vision, dissatisfaction with the status quo and out of the ordinary behavior—are more likely to be praised as protagonists or blamed for the failure.

The researchers argue that power and identity may be to some degree socially constructed and manufactured, through self-romanticism and self-mythologizing.

They also write that romanticized leadership can reinforce the gendered dynamics through which men may be especially prone to elevate other men as leaders, and to try to reinforce male leaders' power and authority, while securing themselves through forms of masculine prestige by association. This raises important issues about gender and masculinity, as well as race and ethnicity.

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**[Warwick Business School](#)**, located in central England, is the largest department of the University of Warwick and ranked in the world's top one per cent business schools by the Financial Times.

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