

Ethnic Minority Leaders and the Glass  
Cliff: The Influence of Context and  
Categorisation on Precarious Leadership  
Appointments

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**Declaration**

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**Dedication**

For the Tiger and Caffster

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### List of Abbreviations

|                 |                                    |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>2SLS</b>     | Two-Stage Least Squares            |
| <b>ANOVA</b>    | Analysis of Variance               |
| <b>APA</b>      | American Psychological Association |
| <b>CEO</b>      | Chief Executive Officer            |
| <b>DCU</b>      | Dublin City University             |
| <b>DCUREC</b>   | DCU Research Ethics Committee      |
| <b>DEI</b>      | Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion   |
| <b>ERI</b>      | Ethnic, Racial, Immigrant          |
| <b>EU</b>       | European Union                     |
| <b>FTSE 100</b> | Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 |
| <b>FTSE 250</b> | Financial Times Stock Exchange 250 |
| <b>HC</b>       | Heteroskedasticity-Consistent      |
| <b>IAT</b>      | Implicit Association Tests         |
| <b>ILT</b>      | Implicit Leadership Theories       |
| <b>IV</b>       | Instrumental Variable              |
| <b>KPI</b>      | Key Performance Indicators         |
| <b>LCT</b>      | Leadership Categorisation Theory   |
| <b>MAR</b>      | Missing at Random                  |
| <b>MCAR</b>     | Missing Completely at Random       |
| <b>MNAR</b>     | Missing Not at Random              |
| <b>OLS</b>      | Ordinary Least Squares             |
| <b>OR</b>       | Odds Ratio                         |
| <b>PMWR</b>     | Prior Manager Win Rate             |
| <b>PPD</b>      | Prior Performance Difference       |
| <b>PSM</b>      | Propensity Score Matching          |
| <b>REC</b>      | Research Ethics Committee          |
| <b>ROA</b>      | Return on Assets                   |
| <b>ROE</b>      | Return on Equity                   |
| <b>S&amp;P</b>  | Standard & Poor                    |
| <b>SCT</b>      | Self-Categorisation Theory         |
| <b>SE</b>       | Standard Error                     |
| <b>SIT</b>      | Social Identity Theory             |
| <b>UK</b>       | United Kingdom                     |
| <b>US</b>       | United States                      |

**Ethnic Minority Leaders and the Glass Cliff: The Influence of Context and  
Categorisation on Precarious Leadership Appointments**

Sean Dempsey

**Abstract**

Building on leadership categorisation theory (Lord et al., 1984), this research investigates the glass cliff phenomenon according to which atypical leaders (e.g., ethnic minorities) are more likely than typical leaders (e.g., White men) to be appointed to precarious leadership roles (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). These roles typically arise from poor organisational performance, instability, or reputational crisis. This five-study, multimethod programme examines how organisational conditions (e.g., organisational ranking or leadership appointment type) influence the likelihood of the glass cliff for ethnic minority leaders. Study 1 used archival data from English professional football and found evidence for the glass cliff, particularly following poor predecessor performance in lower-ranked organisations. Studies 2 and 3 built on Study 1 findings and used experimental designs to test for the glass cliff phenomenon. However, these experiments found no significant difference in the appointment of ethnic minority and White candidates to precarious leadership roles. Study 2 did reveal that ethnic minority candidates were more likely to be appointed to precarious leadership roles compared to secure ones. Study 3 demonstrated that organisational ranking significantly influenced precarious leadership appointments. Studies 4 and 5 extended the examination of the glass cliff phenomenon to a novel leadership context: interim leadership. Study 4 showed that perceived interim role precarity increased the likelihood of ethnic minority candidate appointments. Study 5 provided evidence of this effect through manipulated interim role precarity. Together, these results offer nuanced support for the glass cliff for ethnic minority leaders. They suggest that under specific organisational conditions (e.g., poor predecessor performance, high role precarity in interim leadership, and lower organisational ranking), ethnic minority leaders may be more likely to be appointed to precarious leadership roles compared to White leaders, or are disproportionately selected for riskier over stable roles. This research extends the glass cliff literature by highlighting how predecessor-level performance, rather than organisation-level performance, may precipitate the glass cliff; introducing organisational ranking as a novel moderator; and extending the phenomenon to interim leadership. Limitations, implications, and future research directions are discussed.

**Publications Developed from the Thesis**

**Manuscripts in Preparation**

**Dempsey, S., Bosak J., & Kulich, C.** (in preparation). When predecessors fail in professional football: Ethnic minority glass cliff appointments and the moderating role of organisational ranking.<sup>1</sup>

**Dempsey, S., Bosak J., & Kulich, C.** (in preparation). Interim leadership and the glass cliff: How role precarity shapes the selection of ethnic minority leaders.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Presented as Chapter 5

<sup>2</sup> Presented as Chapter 7

## Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

*Not just in sport but in life, there has long been a perception that  
White middle-class men are bred to lead and Black men are not.  
And as a result, White former players get opportunities that  
simply don't exist for their Black counterparts.*

*Collymore, 2020*

Despite significant advances in promoting and ultimately increasing the number of ethnic minority leaders<sup>3</sup>, leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds remain underrepresented in top leadership roles within organisations (Adamovic & Leibbrandt, 2023). For example, the latest audit of ethnic diversity in business leadership in the United Kingdom (UK) demonstrates incremental progress, with 96% of FTSE 100 organisations meeting or exceeding ethnic diversity targets set out by the Parker Review, a UK business and government-backed commission (Parker, 2022). However, only 7% of FTSE 100 and 5% of FTSE 250 organizations have an ethnic minority CEO,

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<sup>3</sup> In this thesis, the term ethnic minority is used to refer to a diverse group of individuals who are numerical rarities in a particular occupational or societal context (Taylor, 2010). Per the American Psychological Association (APA), race refers to physical differences that are socially significant, whereas ethnicity refers to shared cultural characteristics like ancestry and beliefs (American Psychological Association, 2015). While these terms are distinct, they are often conflated in existing research. This terminology aligns with how ethnic minority individuals have been historically identified in the literature and allows for the important comparisons necessary for this study's methodology (McAvay & Safi, 2023; Robinson et al., 2024). I acknowledge, however, that this is a proxy measure that does not capture the full complexity of social and intersectional identities (Cole, 2009). Despite these limitations, this approach remains valuable for providing key insights into the link between ethnic minority group status and leadership appointment outcomes.

## The Glass Cliff and Ethnic Minority Leaders

which is a stark underrepresentation given that ethnic minorities account for 17% of the UK general population (Parker, 2022; Office for National Statistics, 2025). A similar pattern is evident in the United States (US), where CEOs remain overwhelmingly White leaders: among the S&P 500, 12.2% of CEOs identify as ethnic minorities - a figure significantly lower than the 23% of the labor force they represent (The Conference Board, 2023; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).

Beyond a lack of representation, ethnic minority leaders face many adverse outcomes in the run up to and following leadership appointments, as compared to their ethnic majority counterparts (Zhang et al., 2025). For example, findings suggest that ethnic minority leaders have to assume more risk (e.g., hyperscrutiny or high-risk promotions) compared to ethnic majority leaders when ascending to leadership roles (Glass & Cook, 2019). Even when ascending to leadership roles, ethnic minority leaders are less likely to be recognised for their strong performance than White leaders (Obenauer & Langer, 2019). Beyond traditional challenges around general access to leadership roles, post-appointment outcomes seemingly disadvantage ethnic minority leaders as well (Zhang et al., 2025). While extensive research has documented these adverse outcomes, including reduced performance recognition and elevated career risk, their underlying causes remain underexplored (Obenauer & Kalsher, 2023). This prompts a growing body of research to move beyond general access and focus on the type of leadership roles assigned to ethnic minority leaders. This shift in focus from role appointment to role quality may help illuminate the antecedents of the increased scrutiny and lack of career progression often experienced by ethnic minority leaders (Glass & Cook, 2019).

One such antecedent is the cognitive process of categorisation, a critical psychological principle shaped by perceptions and expectations that ultimately affects the structures of human decision making (Rosch & Mervis, 1975). Categorisation is defined as the formation of categories that provide maximum information with the least cognitive effort (Rosch, 1978). In organisations, categorisation processes are particularly influential in determining who is considered to be a “leader” and who is not. This process is best understood through leadership categorisation theory (LCT), which posits that individuals possess implicit beliefs and mental prototypes about what an ideal leader should be (Lord et al., 1984). In practice, this manifests when evaluating potential leadership candidates, such that decision-makers unconsciously compare the candidate to these internal prototypes.

This cognitive process of prototype matching is not static. Rather, categorisation is a dynamic process that is highly sensitive to the organisational contexts in which decision-makers find themselves (Lord et al., 2020). Understanding this dynamic process of social categorisation (i.e., the implicit structures and associations that shape the formation of social categories like ethnicity; Rothbart & Taylor, 1992) in leadership appointments is critical because leadership appointments are high-stakes decisions with critical consequences for both the selected leader and the organisation (Antonakis & Day, 2018; Jiang et al., 2025).

Social categorisation processes have been identified as factors leading to the overrepresentation of White, male leaders (Petsko & Rosette, 2023; Williams et al., 2022). To date, a body of research has also shown that categorisation affects perceptions of leadership fit for ethnic minority leaders, resulting in their underrepresentation in leadership roles (Rosette et al., 2008). However, the application of LCT has been

limited in analyzing appointments to specific leadership role types, such as precarious leadership. The psycho-social phenomenon of transference (i.e., the application of associations from a person in the past to a person in the present; Andersen et al., 1995) has similarly received insufficient attention in regards to analysing the roles ethnic minority leaders are appointed to. The application of these categorisation processes to specific and precarious leadership contexts, roles arising in situations of poor organisational performance, reputational crisis, or general instability (Ryan & Haslam, 2005), is therefore underexplored.

Furthermore, the appointment of ethnic minority leaders to precarious roles may be underpinned by two interconnected processes. While the initial perceptions of fit to precarious leadership is a result of unconscious categorisation, organisations may also utilise these perceptions of fit as a deliberate strategic choice to signal change when organisational precarity is high (Ihmels et al., 2023). This strategic motivation aligns with signalling theory (Spence, 1973). This theory suggests that in situations of information asymmetry (e.g., an organisational crisis where a path forward is unclear), organisations may use a costly action to convey to stakeholders their intentions for change. The appointment of an ethnic minority leader, who is often a highly visible and atypical choice for leadership positions, can serve as a powerful signal that an organisation is committed to mitigate or reverse organisational precarity (Robinson et al., 2024). This signalling perspective offers a complementary and more conscious rationale than unconscious categorisation alone to explore critical questions around precarious leadership, ethnic minority leaders, and the boundary conditions which shape perceptions of category fit in this context.

### 1.1 The Examination of the Glass Cliff Extending to Ethnic Minority Leaders

Precarious leadership roles were originally conceptualised through the gender perspective as an extension of bias and discrimination against female leaders (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). The original studies identified a phenomenon according to which female leaders were preferred for leadership roles following crisis or poor organisational performance, labelled the glass cliff (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007). This phenomenon is rooted in the concept that the traditional "leader" prototype is often associated with dominant, masculine, and typically White characteristics (Rosette et al., 2008). Because women are perceived as less prototypical leaders (Schein, 2001), they are often overlooked for stable leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002). However, in times of crisis, where a new or different approach is needed, their atypicality makes them a more appealing choice (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). This same logic was then applied to other groups (e.g., ethnic minorities) who are also seen as atypical to the traditional "leader" prototype (Rosette et al., 2008) prompting the exploration of the glass cliff in the context of ethnic minority leadership (Cook & Glass, 2013a; Ryan et al., 2016).

While research on the glass cliff for ethnic minority individuals is still developing and significantly less extensive than studies focusing on gender, the extant empirical evidence to date suggests that ethnic minority leaders are indeed more likely to be appointed to precarious leadership roles (Morgenroth et al., 2020). The effect has been shown in management (Gündemir et al., 2019), sport (Cook & Glass, 2013a), and politics (Kulich et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2024). Several explanations have been advanced to explain the glass cliff phenomenon especially in the context of research on gender and the glass cliff. For example, one potential explanation for the glass cliff is

the “Think Crisis - Think Female” association, which posits that female leaders are seen as possessing communal attributes (e.g., strong people managers) that are perceived as contextually specific and particularly help in times of organisational crisis and uncertainty (Ryan et al., 2011). However, extrapolating similar reasoning (i.e., communality fit for leadership roles in times of crisis, that is, precarious leadership roles) to ethnic minority group members does not hold particularly well (Gündemir et al., 2019; Rosette et al., 2008; Sy et al., 2010).

A number of different explanations have been advanced for the ethnic minority glass cliff, with particular consideration of the signalling motivation hypothesis (i.e., ethnic minority leaders are preferred for precarious leadership to serve as signals of change; Kulich et al., 2015). Moreover, the question as to whether the glass cliff effect can be found in studies or not often depends on highly contextualised factors (e.g., social group structures or political orientation; Kulich et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2024). In addition, results may be affected by methodological insufficiencies, like endogeneity, that affect study outcomes (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Li et al., 2024). The present study responds to calls for further research on the glass cliff phenomenon as it pertains to ethnic minority leadership by integrating leadership categorisation and signalling theory to examine the mechanisms and boundary conditions that may underpin the effect (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Shemla et al., 2024).

### **1.2 Introducing Novel Glass Cliff Boundary Effects**

Despite an array of studies on the glass cliff phenomenon, research to date has not been able to single out a clear underlying motive for glass cliff appointments of women and ethnic minority individuals (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2016). Furthermore, existing research has only examined a limited number of moderators and

boundary conditions for the glass cliff, despite a clear awareness of the phenomenon's context-specificity (Morgenroth et al., 2020). However, recent research has begun to examine organisational factors as potential moderators and boundary conditions of the glass cliff, in line with the principles of the signalling motivation hypothesis. For instance, Shemla et al. (2024) found that the clarity and the timing of an organisation's commitment to change can moderate the glass cliff effect. Their study examined gender quotas as a public signal of change and found that the timing of the quota's implementation, specifically, whether it was pre-announced or formally enforced, was associated with the appointment of women to precarious leadership roles. Similarly, Reinwald et al. (2022) demonstrated that organisations with high investor attention (compared to lower) were more likely to appoint women to leadership positions during a crisis, as this appointment signaled a change to a critical audience. The present research argues that integrating LCT and signalling theory will provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding these boundary conditions. This integrated approach will help clarify how specific organisational signals influence the appointment of atypical leaders, thereby advancing understanding of when and why the glass cliff occurs.

First, I propose that the likelihood of a glass cliff appointment is strongly tied to the perception of failure being a function of the predecessor leader's effectiveness rather than solely fixed-term, organisation-level performance metrics (e.g., quarterly financial results). The existing literature suggests that when poor organisational performance occurs, it highlights the failure of the incumbent leader, who typically embodies the traditional 'leader' prototype (Preston & Carton, 2024). Consequently, individuals who differ from this prototype (e.g., ethnic minorities) may be appointed as a signal of

change. In the present research, I test this logic by specifically examining the link between leadership role precariousness and predecessor-level performance (i.e., the performance of the organisation during the predecessor's entire tenure).

Predecessor-level performance, largely missing from the glass cliff literature that captures the narrative of a predecessor's performance legacy and not just a snapshot of recent financial results, may increase the likelihood of selecting a demographically different successor under precarious conditions. This approach views the precarious leadership category and the glass cliff as a function of predecessor-linked transference effects rather than solely organisational-level motivations (Preston & Carton, 2024). Few studies, to date, have examined the history of atypical leadership (e.g., predecessors) in an organisation as influencing the glass cliff (Morgenroth et al., 2020). For example, one study looked at glass cliff appointments in organisations with a history of female leaders compared to organisations with no female leaders (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010). They found that women were appointed to failing companies only in those organisations that had a prior history of appointing female leaders. However, research has not yet fully explored the direct link between the specific predecessor's performance and its effect on appointment preferences, particularly in the context of ethnic minority leadership.

Second, the present research also considers the strategic importance of an organisation's ranking in relation to precarious leadership. To understand why organisations might prefer an ethnic minority leader, the interrelated nature of an organisation's visibility, familiarity, and size must be considered, a concept which the present research operationalises as organisational ranking (Aguiar-Noury & Garcia-del-Barrio, 2022). Specifically, highly-ranked organisations (e.g., FTSE 100) are

typically larger and receive greater media attention, increasing their public visibility (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). This heightened exposure, in turn, fosters a sense of public familiarity and perceived prominence, which can influence both stakeholder behaviour and organisational decisions (Deephouse, 2000). Previous research has primarily focused on how visibility and signalling are used to explain the appointment of ethnic minority leaders in precarious leadership roles (Takizawa et al., 2024). However, related factors such as an organisation's size (Li et al., 2024) and familiarity have received less attention. By using organisational ranking as a composite proxy for these underexplored factors, the present research argues that organisational ranking moderates the effectiveness of the signalling strategy inherent in appointing an ethnic minority leader. This integration adds a more nuanced understanding of how the organisational context of ranking influences the effectiveness of signalling to affect the likelihood of the glass cliff phenomenon.

Third, the precarious leadership category has predominately been operationalised through a single type of leadership role: permanent leadership (Morgenroth et al., 2020). This is surprising, given the natural link between precarious leadership and interim leadership, a role type defined by its short-term and scope-limited occupancy (Fisher et al., 2024). Additionally, evidence suggests that interim roles fulfill a signalling function when attempting to communicate change to stakeholders following organisational failure that typically precedes interim leadership appointments (Kavadis et al., 2022; Mooney et al., 2016). Therefore, this research extends previous research on the glass cliff phenomenon by examining all three boundary conditions (i.e., predecessor performance, organisational ranking, and interim leadership) through the lens of leadership categorisation and signalling theory.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Research

The present research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a potential preference for ethnic minority leaders' appointment to precarious leadership roles. Although a growing body of evidence supports the existence of the phenomenon (e.g., Cook & Glass, 2013; Gündemir et al., 2019), the boundary conditions that define when and where it occurs require further exploration (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2016). This research therefore builds on leadership categorisation (Lord et al., 1984) and signalling theory (Spence, 1973) to examine the boundary conditions and motivations of organisational decision-makers that may increase the preference for ethnic minority leaders in precarious leadership roles.

Specifically, the present research has three main objectives. First, it examines the glass cliff for ethnic minority leaders by focusing on predecessor-level performance rather than solely on the broader fixed, organisational-level performance typically used in the extant literature. Consistent with ad-hoc categorisation (i.e., applying category structures on the fly; Barsalou, 1983), this approach positions poor predecessor performance as an attribute automatically associated with the leadership role, thereby positioning predecessor performance as a central, context-dependent feature of the precarious leadership category. When an organisation is in a state of precarity and the predecessor fits the White leadership prototype, a strategic choice to deviate away from the White leadership prototype may be made (Preston & Carton, 2024). The appointment of an ethnic minority leader, therefore, serves as a deliberate signalling strategy to communicate a significant break from the past and new organisational direction (Kulich et al., 2015). Second, this research examines how organisations of varying organisational ranking may operationalise a preference for ethnic minority

leaders. By introducing organisational ranking as a novel moderator, this research draws on the signalling literature to explain organisational incentives to convey strategic change that may drive this effect (Kharouf et al., 2020; Spence, 1973). Third, the present research introduces a novel boundary condition and theoretical extension to the glass cliff by analysing a critical leadership role type that has been overlooked in the literature: interim leadership. This contrasts with the focus on permanent leadership roles that have predominately defined the glass cliff (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Interim leadership is a crucial context because these appointments often occur following poor performance (Farah et al., 2020), a lack of tenure security and unclear responsibilities (Mooney et al., 2016), and organisations often use interim leaders as a signal of change (Connelly et al., 2016).

### **1.4 Overview of the Present Study and Research Questions**

The present research consists of eight chapters, which collectively review, empirically test, and discuss the potential preference for ethnic minority leaders in precarious leadership roles via the glass cliff phenomenon. Integrating LCT (Lord et al., 1984; Lord et al., 2020) and signalling theory (Spence, 1973) with the glass cliff phenomenon (Ryan et al., 2005), the present research comprises one archival and four experimental studies that examine: (1) whether ethnic minority leaders are more likely to be appointed to precarious leadership roles than their White counterparts (Studies 1-3); (2) whether the glass cliff effect for ethnic minority leaders is found when focusing on predecessor performance rather than fixed, organisation-level performance (Study 1); (3) whether the glass cliff effect for ethnic minority leaders is moderated by organisational ranking (Studies 1 and 3); and (4) whether the glass cliff effect for ethnic minority leaders can be extended to the interim leadership context (Studies 4 and 5).

The present research is presented in a cohesive monograph format. As further outlined below, two empirical chapters (Chapters 5 and 7) integrate independent scholarly manuscripts that are specifically structured as papers in preparation for submission to academic journals. This format presents primary hypotheses, which are formally established in the theoretical chapters (Chapters 2 and 3), in adjusted frames to align with the self-contained scope of the individual publication manuscripts. The hypotheses will be presented throughout this thesis in a structure adhering to a monograph convention, ensuring continuous, sequential reference rather than adopting independent numbering schemes for the papers in preparation for publication.

In Chapter 2, I introduce LCT and review the literature on ad-hoc categorisation (Barsalou, 1983) and transference (Andersen et al., 1995). From this review, I derive hypotheses regarding the appointment of ethnic minority leaders to precarious roles. Specifically, I link these appointments to the performance of the role predecessor rather than broader group-level leadership associations. In Chapter 3, I provide a comprehensive review of the status quo of the glass cliff literature to date, leading to hypotheses on the extension of the glass cliff to ethnic minority leaders and exploration of novel boundary conditions, which will be empirically tested in Chapters 5 through 7. In Chapter 4, I provide an overview of the research methodology adopted in the present research, including research philosophy, research design, data collection and preparation, and analytical strategy. In Chapter 5, using archival data, I test the glass cliff phenomenon for ethnic minority leaders and the moderating role of organisational ranking, with a particular focus on predecessor performance rather than fixed, organisation-level performance (Study 1). In Chapter 6, I present findings from two vignette studies (Studies 2 and 3) that serve as an experimental test of the glass cliff and

organisational ranking findings presented in Chapter 5. In Chapter 7, I present two additional vignette studies (Studies 4 and 5) that examine the glass cliff in interim leadership contexts. The final chapter, Chapter 8, provides an overall discussion of the findings, including their theoretical and practical implications. This chapter also outlines the limitations, future research directions, as well as providing concluding thoughts on the research output. An overview of the research questions is presented in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1**

*Overview of the Research Questions for the Empirical Chapters*

| Research Question  | Chapter |
|--|---------|
| Are ethnic minority leaders more likely than their White counterparts to be appointed to precarious leadership roles?  | 5 - 7   |
| Is the glass cliff a function of predecessor-level performance performance?  | 5       |
| To what extent does organisational ranking moderate the glass cliff effect for ethnic minority leaders?  | 5, 6    |
| To what extent does interim leadership represent a precarious context for the glass cliff, and does the level of precarity within the interim role itself influence the likelihood of ethnic minority leadership appointments? | 7       |

### **1.5 Contributions of the Present Research**

This research contributes to the leadership and glass cliff literature in four important ways. First, it confirms the contextual nature of the glass cliff as a phenomenon existing at the predecessor-level rather than solely the fixed, organisational-level. The glass cliff phenomenon has been tested using fixed, organisation-level performance measures, which fail to fully capture the subjectivity involved in leadership transitions (Ryan et al., 2016). Although some glass cliff studies

have examined dynamic performance measurement (e.g., Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2021; Thomas & Bodet, 2013), the demographic characteristics of predecessors and their performance have been largely overlooked (Morgenroth et al., 2020). The interpretation of a predecessor's performance is often subjectively applied due to the influence of interpersonal perceptions (Meindl et al., 1985). By focusing on the predecessor, this research investigates the glass cliff phenomenon as an effect determined by these subjective, perception-driven factors.

Second, this research extends glass cliff research beyond permanent leadership and into the increasingly relevant context of interim leadership. CEO tenures are getting shorter, and leadership roles involving interim leaders are becoming more frequent, yet any ethnicity-based preferences for interim leaders remain underexplored (Woods et al., 2020). While evidence suggests that interim leaders are more likely to be selected following poor organisational performance (Fisher et al., 2024; Mooney et al., 2016), no studies to date have considered the glass cliff within this context. This research, therefore, provides new insight by exploring how the inherent precarity of the interim leader role may contribute to glass cliff appointments for ethnic minority leaders. Specifically, I investigate how a preference for ethnic minority candidates might emerge in interim, compared to permanent, leadership roles. Furthermore, I examine how different types of interim leadership roles, which vary in their level of precarity (e.g., an interim role following a CEO's abrupt firing versus an interim role following CEO success), influence the likelihood of an ethnic minority appointment. This approach moves beyond the traditional focus on organisational performance and introduces a new, nuanced boundary condition for the glass cliff phenomenon.

Third, it provides a more comprehensive investigation of the signalling explanation for glass cliff appointments (Kulich et al., 2015; Reinwald et al., 2022) by examining organisational ranking as a moderator of the effect. Organisational factors such as size and familiarity have been found to impact the effectiveness of organisational signals (Kharouf et al., 2020). Yet, glass cliff studies have not considered how comparative industry ranking, indicative of familiarity, size, *and* visibility, may shape the appointment of ethnic minority leaders as a signal of change following poor performance. This research seeks to disentangle signalling motivation underlying the glass cliff by introducing organisational ranking as a novel moderator.

Fourth, this research addresses a significant gap in glass cliff studies by focusing on ethnic minority leaders in precarious leadership appointments. Relatively few studies have investigated ethnic minority leaders as the focal group for glass cliff appointments (Morgenroth et al., 2020). However, the limited evidence to date suggests that ethnic minority glass cliff exists and requires further investigation (e.g., Cook & Glass, 2013a; Gündemir et al., 2019; Kulich et al., 2014). This research adds to this nascent literature and explores contexts and moderators that disproportionately affect ethnic minority leaders. In doing so, this research offers a novel perspective on leadership appointments that helps explain why ethnic minority leaders may be preferred during periods of organisational precarity.

### **1.6 Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter has introduced and framed the background to the research problem, outlined the key objectives and research questions, and described the scope and structure of the present research. In addressing the underrepresentation of ethnic minority leaders, this research contributes a novel perspective on the conditions

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under which ethnic minority leaders are most likely to be appointed, advancing both theory and practice on leadership selection and organisational decision-making. The next two chapters will introduce the literature relating to leadership categorisation and the glass cliff which informed the hypotheses development in the present research.

## Chapter 2: Leadership Categorisation Theory

*“With a height of 6’5” and shoulder-length, wavy hair, Adam’s unique presence dominates every room he swaggers into. When former employees and investors describe Adam, the number one attribute used is “charismatic.” (Pollard, 2023)*

The founder of WeWork, Adam Neumann, could capture any room he walked into with his tall, charismatic, and domineering persona. He embodied the White, Silicon Valley founder prototype and the business community responded in-kind with outsized investments into his fledgling property rental business. Despite an unproven track record and a shaky business model, investors flocked to Adam in the belief they were uncovering the next tech industry unicorn. As he and his business model were exposed, Adam Neumann was finally relieved of his duties through a golden parachute deal netting him a \$1 billion package softening the landing to his failure. The question is, why was Adam Neumann believed to be a great tech leader in the first place? His fit to what people expected him to be as a prototypical White, male leader superseded the reality of his qualifications and bona fides (Sherman, 2019).

This chapter will outline introduce and review the concept of precarious leadership through the perspectives of (leadership) categorisation (Lord et al., 1984; Rosette et al., 2008) and transference theory (Andersen et al., 1995; Andersen & Chen, 2002; Ritter & Lord, 2007). From the leadership categorisation perspective, I argue that

while ethnic minority leaders are not perceived to fit the typical leadership prototype, certain organisational contexts (e.g., poor organisational performance, reputational crisis, or general organisational instability) enhance perceived fit for members of such groups. Building on LCT, this chapter explores how leadership transference effects (Ritter & Lord, 2007) may underpin the appointment of atypical leaders to precarious leadership roles, categorised as a glass cliff appointment.

### **2.1 Typicality and Categorisation: Categorisation Theory**

The process of categorisation, that is the tendency to group objects or individuals by common traits and characteristics, is a fundamental part of human nature in that it allows individuals to efficiently process and structure information (Hamilton, 2007; Rosch, 1978; Stangor et al., 1992). The structure of these categories is defined by the principle of perceived cue validity or family resemblance (i.e., possessing many features with other category members and possessing few features associated with other categories) (Dieciuc & Folstein, 2018; Rosch & Mervis, 1975; Rosch, 1978). As such, any category is the coalescence of attributes which are socially accepted and in turn shape the boundaries of category membership (Vergne & Wry, 2013).

This conceptualisation of categories has tended to fall within a typological frame consisting of natural (i.e., existing beyond human intervention) and artificial categories (i.e., existing through human intervention; Lingle et al., 1984). Social categories (e.g., ethnicity and gender) have characteristics of artificial categories but are predominately treated as natural ones viewed as unalterable by human intervention (Rothbart & Taylor, 1992). While categorisation serves an economical purpose in enhancing mental efficiency, the application of categorisation has been shown to differ based on context, particularly when considering social categorisation (Quadflieg &

Macrae, 2011). Evidence suggests that factors such as ideology can impact the tendency to categorise social groups and the application to associate category traits to group members (Haas et al., 2019). Research into the leadership category provides a clear example of this social categorisation phenomenon.

The study of who is perceived to fit, or not fit, the socially constructed leadership category has received increased attention in the management literature over the past few decades (Rosette et al., 2008; Sewell et al., 2022; Steffens et al., 2020). Socially perceived attributes form the basis of categories, such as “leaders”, establishing the criteria for what constitutes category membership or fit (Rosch, 1978). This aligns with research on Implicit Leadership Theories (ILTs), which conceptualise the cognitive schemas individuals use to structure expectations about leader characteristics, behaviours, and effectiveness (Epitropaki et al., 2013; Lord et al., 1984, 2020). The “leader” category functions as a superordinate category within social cognition (Lord et al., 1984), encompassing more specific subcategories (e.g., political leader, business leader) and establishing the boundary for who is recognised as a leader. This implicitly distinguishes those who do not fit the category from those who do.

Research suggests that the leader category consists of central attributes (e.g., intelligence, honesty, determination, dedication) that are applied to assess and hierarchically structure perceptions of fit for potential category members (Lord et al., 1984). Various models of ILTs have identified slightly different sets of common leadership traits across studies (e.g., Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Offermann et al., 1994) and cultural contexts (Den Hartog et al., 1999), but they generally converge on a core set of competence-related characteristics. However, the broadest and most inclusive conceptualisation of leadership (i.e., the superordinate level category) under-emphasises

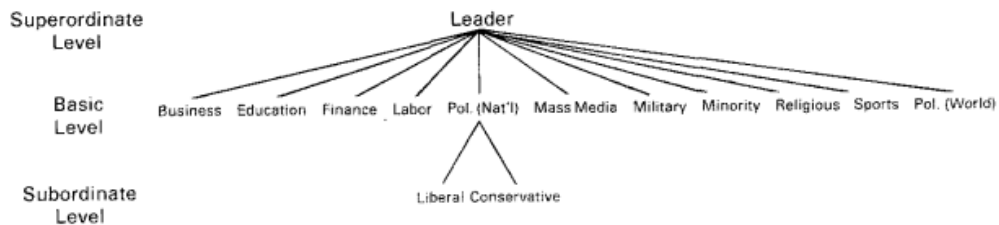
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the contextual factors that impact how individuals apply categorisation to their specific leadership construct (e.g., basic level categories as seen through industry, organisation, culture, etc.; Lord et al., 1984). In some leadership category contexts, identity-based cues (e.g., gender, ethnicity) may also influence how these common leadership traits are perceived and subsequently applied, as suggested by lack-of-fit perspectives (Heilman, 1983; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Subordinate categories beneath the broader “leader” category (e.g., political leader, and more narrowly, conservative political leader) reduce inclusivity by narrowing the range of attributes considered typical of the category (Rosch, 1978). The original conceptualisation of the superordinate, basic, and subordinate leader categories are shown in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1**

*Leader Category Conceptualisation from Lord et al. (1984)*



The intersection of subordinate leader categories (i.e., tech leader and political leader blending to form tech leaders in politics) increases the level of ambiguity and fuzziness within each subsequent subordinate category (Vergne & Wry, 2013). To reduce ambiguity in social perception, individuals rely on leader prototypes. These are defined as the most typical or ideal example within a category and are used as cognitive shortcuts to assess who fits within the leadership category (Gabora et al., 2008; Lord et

al., 1984; Zarate & Smith, 1990). The most common application of a leader prototype at both the superordinate and an overwhelming majority of subordinate categories aligns with traits associated with White, male leaders (Rosette et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2025). Two factors critical to category establishment reinforcing a specific ethnic link to leadership are the persistence and prominence of leader prototypes being White.

Categorisation theory operates on two levels: how individuals are categorised by others based on socially shared expectations (the "categorical imperative") and how individuals categorise themselves in relation to those expectations (self-categorisation) (Turner, 1975; Turner & Reynolds, 2012; Turner et al., 1979; Vergne & Wry, 2013; Zuckerman, 1999). The categorical imperative is most relevant to understanding organisational dynamics and the selection of leaders by others (Vergne & Wry, 2013). Accordingly, this research focuses on the categorical imperative and how external, socially constructed category definitions shape leader selection rather than on the internal, individual-level processes of self-categorisation and leadership fit (Leonardelli & Toh, 2015; see Table 2.1 for a summary of key theoretical frameworks related to categorisation and social identity in leadership). Within the categorical imperative, Durand and Paolella (2012) outline three ways in which categories are cognitively structured: prototype-based categories (i.e., category fit relying on similarity to an ideal or most representative member); goal-based categories (i.e., categories defined by the purpose they serve); and causal-model-based categories, (i.e., categories structured around perceived cause-and-effect relationships between category features). The present research focuses on prototype and goal-based categorisation, as these are most relevant for understanding how leader categories are socially constructed and evaluated. Prototype-based categorisation helps explain how certain leader traits (e.g., charisma,

confidence) or exemplars become idealised within categories. Goal-based categorisation, on the other hand, helps explain how leadership appointments may serve symbolic or strategic functions, such as signalling change or a shift towards organisational diversity. In contrast, causal-model-based categorisation, which centres on functional reasoning (e.g., “financial expertise causes effective leadership”) is less applicable here as the study’s emphasis lies in social perception rather than mechanistic assessments of leadership competence. The following section explores the formation and persistence of such prototypes within organisations.

**Table 2.1**

*Summary of Key Theoretical Frameworks in Leadership Perception and Categorisation*

| <b>Theoretical Construct</b>           | <b>Description</b>  | <b>Key Sources</b>                                |
|--|---|---|
| Leadership Categorisation Theory (LCT) | How individuals are assigned to the “leader” category based on shared social schemas and prototypes.    | Lord et al., 1984; Lord et al., 2020              |
| Implicit Leadership Theories (ILTs)    | Cognitive templates or schemas individuals use to evaluate leader traits, behaviour, and effectiveness. | Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Offermann et al., 1994 |
| Leader Prototypes                      | The most typical or ideal example of a leader within a category; used to evaluate fit and suitability.  | Haslam et al., 2022; Lord et al.,                 |

|                                  |   |   |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
|                                  |   | 1984; Rosch,<br>1978                                  |
| Lack-of-Fit Model                | Leadership bias occurs when group stereotypes (e.g., gender, ethnicity) are incongruent with role demands.        | Heilman,<br>1983                                      |
| Role Congruity Theory            | Prejudice arises when leader roles conflict with societal stereotypes for particular social groups (e.g., gender) | Eagly &<br>Karau, 2002                                |
| Social Identity Theory (SIT)     | People favour ingroup members, and group identity shapes interpersonal and leadership perceptions.                | Turner et al.,<br>1979; Turner<br>& Reynolds,<br>2012 |
| Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT) | Individuals assess their own fit within social categories based on context and identity salience.                 | Leonardelli<br>& Toh,<br>2015; Turner<br>et al., 1979 |

## 2.2 The White Leadership Prototype

Within any category, prototypes emerge as the focal representation of the category itself (Lord et al., 1984; Rosch, 1978; Rosch & Mervis, 1975). Prototypes are applied to individuals to evaluate their alignment with core category attributes, thereby structuring in-group membership and distinguishing it from relevant out-groups (Hogg, 2001). Congruence between a leader candidate and the established leader prototype

enhances perceived category fit, which in turn improves evaluations of leader suitability and performance and increases the likelihood of leadership emergence (Lord et al., 2020). Research also suggests that the more prototypical (e.g., prototypical of in-group majorities) a leader is in the eyes of followers, the more likely they are to be followed (Haslam et al., 2022). While the prototype-matching process for the general “leader” category is well established, less is known about how this process operates when evaluating ethnic minority leadership candidates. This is a critical gap, as ethnic minorities are often perceived as less prototypical leaders given the dominant leadership schemas (Obenauer & Kalsher, 2023; Petsko & Rosette, 2023; Rosette et al., 2008; Ubaka et al., 2023).

The application of prototype schemas depends on how category permanence is conceptualised, that is either as fixed (i.e., with enduring and socially reinforced attributes; Lambon Ralph et al., 2010) or as ad hoc (i.e., shaped by contextual demands and constructed in the moment; Barsalou, 1983). When leadership categories are treated as fixed, they tend to preserve dominant, historically embedded prototypes. In Western organisational contexts, this has contributed to the persistence of White leaders as the prevailing prototype (e.g., “Think Leader – Think White” prototype), reinforcing their perceived fit and legitimacy over time (Rosette et al., 2008). The White leader prototype, as seen with Adam Neumann from WeWork, is supported by its persistence (i.e., the historical overrepresentation of White leaders) as well as the prominence (i.e., White leaders serving as the ideal leader prototype) in contemporary organisational and societal structures.

### ***2.2.1 Persistence of the Fixed White Leader Category Prototype***

The continued overrepresentation of White leaders across industries reinforces the idea of a White leader as the standard or prototypical figure in leadership roles (Lu, 2024; Petsko & Rosette, 2023; Rosette et al., 2008). For instance, leadership at top British and US organisations remains overwhelmingly populated by White leaders. Currently, 94% of FTSE 250 organisations are led by White CEOs (Parker, 2024). Similar data can be found in S&P and Fortune 500 organisations (86%, CristKolder, 2024). Beyond business, elected members of governments in the EU and UK largely consist of White politicians. In 2024, 95% of the newly elected European Members of Parliament were White (Kroet, 2024). Although there has been incremental progress in the representation of ethnic minority leaders, these figures continue to fall significantly short of reflecting broader population demographics (Race Equality Unit, n.d.). The long-standing and cross-sectoral nature of this trend has contributed to the entrenchment of the White leader prototype in the collective social consciousness, reinforcing perceptions of leadership as predominantly White.

### ***2.2.2 Prominence of Fixed White Leader Category Prototype***

The second factor presented as impacting the establishment and maintenance of the White leader prototype is the prominence and salience of White leaders in the social zeitgeist. The prominent leaders associated with success and therefore serve as exemplars (i.e., Presidents, Prime Ministers, business owners) have been predominantly White (Sewell et al., 2022). Notwithstanding the distribution of White and ethnic minority high-profile leaders, salient exemplars, such as Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, and Steve Jobs, are often the first and most commonly encountered examples of leaders, shaping early perceptions of what leaders look like and reinforcing their

association with the category. Business exemplars are often attributed prowess and prominence for their impact on industry and overall net worth (Liu & Baker, 2016). As of 2024, the wealthiest American-based business leaders are overwhelmingly White (Peterson-Withorn, 2024). Individuals such as Mark Zuckerberg (tech - Meta), Warren Buffet (holding companies - Berkshire Hathaway), Phil Knight (retail - Nike) are idolised as standard bearers in their respective industries. The prominence and ubiquity of White exemplar category members continue to maintain the White leader prototype and the socially dominant understanding of the “leader” category (Rosette et al., 2008). However, more recent work suggests that perceptions of the leadership category may be gradually expanding to include more racially diverse candidates, as exposure to salient ethnic minority leaders increases (Ubaka et al., 2023). While these shifts mark a move toward greater inclusion, the extent to which they reshape deeply held prototype boundaries remains contested (Obenauer & Kalsher, 2023). Moving beyond fixed perceptions of White leadership prototypicality, the next section examines how ad hoc categorisation processes offer a different perspective on prototype formation, potentially allowing for increased leadership diversity.

### ***2.2.3 Ad-Hoc Categories and Prototypes***

Despite strong cultural associations with the fixed “leader” category, ad-hoc categories offer a differentiated perspective on how categories and prototypes can be structured (Poitrenaud et al., 2005). In contrast to fixed, common categories (e.g., “leader”), ad-hoc categories are constructed “on the fly” to achieve a specific goal (Barsalou, 1983). Ad-hoc categories (e.g., ways to make friends; Barsalou, 1983) assume a functional typicality which “reflects how fleeting context and task demands transiently recruit a subset of the information in semantic memory to rapidly construct

temporary conceptual structures” (Dieciuc & Folstein, 2018, p. 499). For example, research suggests that prototypicality can differ between knowledge levels (i.e., novices and experts; Lynch et al., 2000) and across cultures (Gerstner & Day, 1994). Most significant for this research, prototypicality was also found to differ within individuals based on the task being undertaken (Medin et al., 1997). In their study of tree experts, participants' judgments of a tree species' prototypicality varied based on their professional discipline (e.g., taxonomist, landscaper) and the specific task they were focused on. While current research suggests that the fixed category and prototype of a “leader” have traditionally skewed toward White men, the ad-hoc nature of categories indicates that there may be instances in which non-White leaders are seen as a better fit for specific tasks when considered for leadership roles. Barsalou (1983) identified ad-hoc categories as highly context dependent, shaping the hierarchy of the category based on a primed context. For example, a chair can equally be something that “fits into the trunk of a car” or “serve emergency firewood” based on the context being primed. Extending this logic of context dependency to the leader category, the perceived desirability of and preference for certain leadership traits, such as assertiveness or extraversion, may vary across organisational contexts (e.g., a high-performing vs. poor-performing company; Gündemir et al., 2019, or a start-up vs. legacy institution; Hoang et al., 2024). What constitutes a prototypical leader may shift depending on the goals, culture, or challenges faced by the organisation. Prior research suggests that leader typicality, particularly for ethnic minority leaders, may be reliant on a contextual nuance as explained in ad-hoc categories (Ritter & Lord, 2007; Rosette et al., 2008). We will discuss how (a)typicality, particularly for ethnic minority leaders, fluctuates within the leader category in the following sections.

### **2.3 Ethnic Minority Leaders Lack of Fit to the Leadership Prototype**

The application of leader prototypes becomes particularly consequential when evaluating members of stigmatised social groups. In these cases, trait-based stereotypes, whether negative or simply non-leadership-aligned, can significantly distort perceptions of leadership fit (Gündemir et al., 2019; Petsko & Rosette, 2023; Rosette et al., 2008). Non-White ethnic minority groups often face pervasive trait-based stereotypes that hinder their perceived fit with the leadership category, whether through the assignment of negative traits (e.g., aggressiveness, emotional volatility) or positive traits that are not aligned with leadership schemas (e.g., being musical or athletic). For instance, Black Americans have long been subjected to stereotypes portraying them as less competent or less educated than members of other ethnic groups (Petsko & Rosette, 2023). These stereotypes not only undermine perceptions of leadership ability but also create systemic barriers to leadership emergence (Gardner et al., 2024; Joshi & Roh, 2009). Similarly, these negative trait associations have been found to negatively impact perceived leadership qualities and skills (Petsko & Rosette, 2023; Rosette et al., 2008; Sy et al., 2010). Beyond negatively valenced trait associations, perceptions of poor fit to the superordinate leader category traits have been found to hinder leadership emergence for ethnic minority individuals (Gündemir et al., 2014; Rosette et al., 2008; Sy et al., 2010). For example, East Asians are often perceived as less fitting to the leader prototype compared to South Asians and White individuals. This is due, in part, to lower perceived creativity, which negatively impacts their emergence as potential leaders (Lu, 2024). Negative trait associations or lacking fit to preferred traits result in poor alignment with fixed schemas of the “leader” as outlined by Epitropaki and Martin (2004), thus making selection to leadership roles less likely.

However, not all traits must carry negative connotations to influence perceptions of ethnic minority leaders' prototypicality. Some ethnic minority groups are viewed as highly competent, which can be an advantage when it comes to leadership perceptions. For example, Asian leaders are often stereotyped as intelligent and capable (Sy et al., 2010). However, this perceived competence may not always help them emerge as leaders, because it is often accompanied by assumptions that they lack charisma or assertiveness, which are traits that are also considered important for leadership (Lu, 2024; Sy et al., 2010). Similarly, research suggests that over-indexing on a singular attribute (e.g., intelligence) aligned to the leader prototype can have a curvilinear effect on leadership perception as to harm perceived category fit (Antonakis et al., 2016). While fixed conceptualisations of the leader prototype have diminished leadership emergence and selection for ethnic minority group members, a look at ad-hoc categories may explain a shift in preference for ethnic minority leaders when the context is advantageous.

### ***2.3.1 Ad-Hoc Categorisation and Ethnic Minority Leaders Fit to the Leadership Prototype***

The ad-hoc categorisation model has been demonstrated to increase leader prototypicality for ethnic minority leaders under the right contexts. Research suggests that framing the leadership context via industry or job type may increase leader prototypicality for certain ethnic minority groups (Bauer & Hannover, 2021; Sy et al., 2010). For example, Asian men fitting the "gifted" prototype have an increased perceived sense of inclusion and belonging in intellectual environments such as scholarship organisations (Bauer & Hannover, 2021). Similarly, Sy and colleagues

(2010) identified that Asian leaders were preferred in leadership contexts suited to engineering organisations as opposed to general leadership contexts such as sales.

Context specificity of ad-hoc categorisation allows individuals to reformulate the superordinate category to fit moment-in-time needs. The increase in ethnic minority leaders appointed to roles associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives has reshaped what Barsalou (1983) referred to as instance-to-concept associations within the leader category. A recent study found that ethnic minority (compared to White) leaders were more likely to be presumed to be DEI leaders, more likely to possess the traits required to succeed in such a role, and ultimately receive stronger leader evaluations when in a DEI leadership role (Paluch & Shum, 2024). The alignment between context and ethnic minority fit also extends beyond ad-hoc categorisation of the leader category through a process called goal-based stereotyping.

When appointing an ethnic minority leader, individuals have been found to apply variable weighting to leadership attributes to affirm their decision to deviate from White leadership (Carton & Rosette, 2011). For example, Black men, typically perceived at a group level as low in competence, were found to have high competence attributions when competence was perceived as reflective of a talent (e.g., art, sport, etc.) rather than of intellect (Walzer & Czopp, 2011). Applied to the leader context, individuals prioritise talent-based competence as the key driver of a competence rating when the context permits it (i.e., hiring for a leadership position in the sports industry; Carton & Rosette, 2011). Similarly, Black leaders may be preferred in organisational contexts which demand command-and-control leaders due to the attribute of control typically ascribed to Black men (Ogbu, 1985). Having established that leadership categories shift in response to broader contextual cues, I now examine how awareness

of predecessor attributes can influence perceptions of successor fit, particularly via exemplar-based processes such as transference.

### **2.4 Leadership Transference Effects**

When prototypicality emerges from category exemplars, those exemplars become reference points for judging whether new stimuli fit the category in question (Pierro & Kruglanski, 2008). Beyond serving as abstract comparators, exemplars can also shape perceptions of a new individual's behaviour, competency, and personality when there is high similarity (e.g., shared demographic features or personality traits). This process is known as transference (Andersen et al, 1995; Andersen & Chen, 2002; Glassman & Andersen, 1999). Transference involves the activation of established mental representations (e.g., an individual is very sensitive) established by a “significant-other” and applied to new individuals (Glassman & Andersen, 1999). Andersen and Chen’s relational-self theory (2002) conceptualises transference as the socio-cognitive process explaining the application of prior “significant other” representations to future relationships (e.g., past leader associations to a new leader). In contrast to abstract category-based prototypes, transference introduces a more personalised lens for evaluating others in using traits from specific individuals to make novel assertions about similar but distinct others. However, these significant other representations often contain embedded social category information, such as ethnicity, gender, or status, which means that broader social cues (e.g., minority status) can still meaningfully influence leadership perceptions through transference (Ritter & Lord, 2007). In this way, transference offers a complementary perspective to prototypicality, as it demonstrates how a perceiver's social evaluations of leadership can be shaped by

both their past personal experiences with significant others (e.g., a former boss, a parent) and broader, socially constructed categories

Although transference has been widely explored in social psychology, its application within organisational leadership contexts remains limited (Asante et al., 2021; Pierro & Kruglanski, 2008; Ritter & Lord, 2007). Leader transference is defined as the occurrence of leader perceptions being transferred from a predecessor onto the evaluations of a new, similar successor (Pierro & Kruglanski, 2008; Ritter & Lord, 2007). Ritter and Lord (2007; study 2) found that individuals with prior leaders similar to their new leader transferred expectations of abusive or just treatment from the old to the new leader. Additionally, Pierro and Kruglanski (2008) demonstrated that individuals with a need for cognitive closure (i.e., an individual's desire for firm answers to avoid ambiguity) were more likely to exhibit transference behaviour in leadership scenarios. Given the need for cognitive closure is heightened during times of organisational change, leadership appointments represent a particularly likely context for transference effects to occur (Pierro et al., 2005).

While these studies shed light on behavioural and attitudinal considerations of leadership transference, the role of demographic similarity is underexplored. Further research is required to “gauge the contextual factors (i.e., ethnicity, age, and gender) present in real-life interactions that are likely to affect cognitive and social processes... that surely impact notions of similarity and affect transference” (Ritter & Lord, 2007, p. 1693). This raises an important question related to leadership appointments: How might predecessor demography, behaviour, and disposition activate transference motivations when making leadership appointments? Pursuant to this enquiry, Preston and Carton (2024) present the concept of racial transference, which examines the precise ways in

which ethnic similarity and organisational performance affect the initiation of transference effects in leadership transitions. This perspective may demonstrate how ethnicity might be influential in impacting leader fit perceptions in appointment contexts.

### ***2.4.1 Racial Transference as Goal-Based Categorisation***

Racial transference refers to the assumption that leadership candidates who share ethnic identities also share similar personality traits and leadership effectiveness (Preston & Carton, 2024). While originally framed around performance dynamics, this process may serve a broader goal-based function. The present research builds on this racial transference concept by applying it to contexts of organisational precarity, such as downturns, reputational threats, or transitional uncertainty, where it can be used to exploit similarity cues in an effort to restore legitimacy or signal change. The racial transference perspective highlights a limitation of LCT, which tends to operate at a superordinate level in emphasising abstract, dominant associations such as the “Think Leader – Think White” prototype (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Rosette et al., 2008). Empirical findings suggest that predecessor performance influences preferences for successor ethnicity (Preston & Carton, 2024). For example, Preston and Carton (2024) found across three experimental vignettes studies that evaluators rejected Black (White) leadership candidates when the predecessor was a low-performing Black (White) leader. This effect was mediated by trait-based assumptions, wherein ethnic similarity led to transference of personality and competence expectations from the predecessor to the successor (Preston & Carton, 2024). Racial transference demonstrates that organisational performance may reorganise superordinate conceptions of the leader

category to increase the perceived fit of ethnic minority leaders following poor performing White predecessors.

As developed through this chapter, prototype and categorisation theory argue that the dominant social ascription of a “leader” is to White men (Rosette et al., 2008). However, ad-hoc categorisation develops the argument that this social ascription of prototypicality may vary depending on what the organisational context requires (Barsalou, 1983; Paluch & Shum, 2024). Transference theory, and racial transference more specifically, builds on concepts of similarity and dissimilarity to suggest that a leader's perceived fit is a response to an individual's performance. In contexts where information about a predecessor's performance is available, this process leads to a preference for similarity after success and dissimilarity after failure. In the absence of such information, individuals are more likely to fall back on the dominant “leader” prototype. Taken together, these theories suggest that while White leaders are most frequent due to their prototypicality, a preference for a dissimilar leader following poor performance should logically increase the likelihood of appointing an ethnic minority leader.

In this way, precarity becomes a context in which the social perception of a leader can shift to favor ethnic minority candidates. Accordingly, this research hypothesises that ethnic minority leaders are preferred and thus disproportionately appointed to precarious leadership positions compared to White leaders and will be tested in the empirical chapters, Chapters 5 -7, through the following:

**Hypothesis 1:** Ethnic minority leaders are more likely than their White counterparts to be appointed to precarious leadership roles during periods of low organisational performance.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has developed a theoretical foundation connecting leadership categorisation, prototype theory, and transference processes to the underexplored area of ethnic minority leadership. By looking at how leader prototypes are created and maintained by organisational and societal conventions, it is possible to see how White leaders continue to be the prototypical representation of the leadership category. Yet, categorisation is not static. The ad hoc nature of categorisation suggests that contextual factors, such as organisational performance, can temporarily modify leader prototype fit, making ethnic minority leaders appear more suitable for leadership roles under specific conditions. Transference theory extends this view by illustrating how perceptions of a predecessor influence the evaluation of potential successors, particularly when demographic similarities are salient. Within this, racial transference has emerged as a critical mechanism for understanding how ethnicity and performance interact to affect leadership appointments. Together, these perspectives suggest that ethnic minority leaders may be disproportionately appointed to precarious leadership positions following periods of low organisational performance, a phenomenon known as the glass cliff. The following chapter investigates the glass cliff phenomenon in detail.

### **Chapter 3: The Precarious Leadership Category and the Glass Cliff Phenomenon**

Extending the discussion on differential leadership opportunities, this chapter examines the precarious leadership category through the lens of the glass cliff phenomenon. This phenomenon suggests that ethnic minority leaders are more likely than White leaders to be appointed to precarious leadership roles. These are roles that arise in contexts of poor organisational performance, reputational crises, or general organisational instability (Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Ryan et al., 2016). Following the discussion of goal-based categorisation in Chapter 2, this chapter begins by exploring how context-specificity and motivation underpin the glass cliff phenomenon, thereby creating conditions that increase the preference for ethnic minority leaders for precarious leadership roles (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Next, the chapter examines the existing, but relatively limited, research on the application of the glass cliff phenomenon to ethnic minority leadership. The chapter then discusses potential novel boundary conditions of the glass cliff effect derived from the extant literature on signalling and interim leadership. To conclude, the chapter explores existing limitations within the glass cliff literature which this research sets out to address.

#### **3.1 Atypical Leadership and Role Precarity: The Glass Cliff Phenomenon**

Leadership transitions frequently have adverse effects on organisations, irrespective of the underlying reasons for the change (Connelly et al., 2020; Schepker et al., 2017). Leaders appointed following periods of poor organisational performance often confront short term countervailing forces resulting from the prior leader's failure (Kim et al., 2020). For example, diminished corporate cultures, weakened financial standing, and damaged external reputation are all associated with leadership transitions

following poor performance which heavily influence future organisational outcomes (Hutzschenreuter et al., 2012). Emerging research suggests that ethnic minority leaders, as atypical leadership candidates, are disproportionately appointed to precarious leadership roles, where organisational instability and constrained resources are more likely to limit future success (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Obenauer & Langer, 2019; Ryan et al., 2016). The section that follows will provide an overview of the limited investigation of the glass cliff in the context of ethnic minority leadership.

### ***3.1.1 Ethnic Minority Leaders and the Glass Cliff***

While initial research on the glass cliff positioned the phenomenon as a gendered construct (Gündemir et al., 2019; Morgenroth et al., 2020), a growing body of evidence has begun to explore its relevance for ethnic minority leaders (Aelenei et al., 2020; Cook & Glass, 2013a; Gündemir et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2024; Takizawa et al., 2024). This emerging literature, consisting of a limited number of studies, provides initial support for the glass cliff phenomenon and ethnic minority leaders, albeit with a small effect size (Hedges  $g = .18$ ; Morgenroth et al., 2020). The following section reviews this emerging literature in detail. First, I examine empirical evidence of the glass cliff among ethnic minority leaders. Second, I explore proposed psychological and contextual mechanisms driving these appointment patterns. In particular, I examine why ethnic minority leaders may be preferred in precarious organisational contexts. Finally, I consider subgroup differences within ethnic minority categories to understand how the glass cliff may differentially affect individual ethnic minority groups.

The first glass cliff study on ethnic minority leadership was published nearly a decade after the phenomenon was originally identified by Michelle Ryan and S. Alexander Haslam in the context of gender (2005). In this initial study, Cook and Glass

(2013a) found that Black coaches were more likely to be appointed to lead US collegiate basketball teams with more losses in the prior year compared to their White counterparts. The glass cliff for ethnic minority leaders has been further found across political (Kelly et al., 2018; Kulich et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2024) and broader business (Gündemir et al., 2019) contexts. For example, Kelly and colleagues (2018) found that Black political candidates were preferred in times of economic turmoil or socio-economic decline. Similarly, in the organisational context, Gündemir and colleagues (2019) analysed 5,000 CEO appointments in the US and found that Asian American CEOs were 2.5 times more likely to be appointed to firms facing organisational decline as opposed to non-decline. While emerging evidence suggests the applicability of the glass cliff phenomenon to ethnic minority leaders, further research is required to fully understand why ethnic minority leaders would be preferred for precarious leadership and how those motivations may differ for ethnic minority groups.

To date, the motivation for the glass cliff remains unclear, particularly regarding why ethnic minority leaders would be specifically preferred for precarious leadership roles. While communal leadership traits have been linked to perceived fit for relational crises (e.g., internal disharmony), this link does not fully explain the preference for atypical leaders, as women have been shown to be preferred across various crisis types (Kulich et al., 2021). Moreover, existing research suggests that broad assumptions about gendered or ethnic traits do not consistently account for the appointment of atypical leaders to precarious roles, especially given that trait expectations can differ significantly across specific ethnic groups (Adjei Boateng & Heilman, 2024; Morgenroth et al., 2020). Limited evidence suggests that specific behavioural associations may lead to the preference for ethnic minority leaders in precarious

leadership roles. For example, Gündemir et al. (2019) identified that self-sacrificing leaders were preferred during organisational decline. Given that Asian American leaders are often perceived as possessing self-sacrificing tendencies (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998), this group association may contribute to their disproportionate appointment to precarious leadership roles. While evidence for potential motivations for appointing ethnic minority leaders to precarious positions is being established, it is crucial to recognise the potential heterogeneity of this phenomenon across ethnic minority groups (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Expectations associated with specific ethnic minority groups vary significantly and thus so will the motivations for the glass cliff.

While emerging evidence supports the existence of the glass cliff phenomenon for ethnic minority leaders, it is crucial to acknowledge that the strength and even the presence of this effect can vary significantly across contexts. I argue this variation is explained by the goal-based (Carton & Rosette, 2011) and ad-hoc (Barsalou, 1983; Dieciuc & Folstein, 2018) categorisation processes discussed in Chapter 2. The precarious leadership context creates a specific, goal-oriented category that reorients attention away from prototypical, superordinate preferences for White leaders and towards a set of attributes perceived as necessary to address the specific situation. Returning to the findings from Gündemir and colleagues (2019), this shift opens the door for self-sacrificing leaders, a trait that is often antithetical to traditional leadership attributes (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004).

Additional evidence for ad-hoc categorisation and precarious leadership can be found in recent research by Takizawa et al. (2024). They identified that ethnic minority candidates were most likely to be selected in low-attention crisis scenarios compared to high-attention crisis scenarios associated with the glass cliff. In the political context,

Robinson and colleagues (2024) found that ethnic minority leaders were more exposed to glass cliff conditions when associated with conservative (compared to progressive) political parties. Aligning to the subordinate categorisation process mentioned in Chapter 2, these findings highlight the importance of recognising the contextual factors that may influence the glass cliff on ethnic minority leaders. Next, the impact of context dependency on the glass cliff phenomenon is further elaborated, with particular focus on the critical importance of selecting how role precariousity and comparative organisational factors are measured.

### ***3.1.2 Context - Specific Phenomenon***

The glass cliff phenomenon is a nuanced and highly context-specific phenomenon (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2016). As discussed in Chapter 2, categorisation processes around precarious leadership are not triggered without the contextual signals that allow perceivers to classify organisations as precarious or in crisis. The nature of how organisational performance is measured (Cook & Glass, 2014; Haslam et al., 2010; Reinwald et al., 2022) is therefore a critical factor in defining the signals that inform precarious leadership categorisation. In this section, I highlight how performance measurement and organisational motivation are two key factors that underpin the categorisation-based mechanisms of the glass cliff.<sup>4</sup>

**Measuring Organisational Precarity.** The essence of the glass cliff is that these leadership appointments come with high risk of failure (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Defining leadership roles as risky and precarious, however, has taken many forms within the extant literature (for a full list, see Table 3.1). Past financial performance has

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the scarcity of research on the glass cliff for ethnic minority leaders, I will explore each contextual factor through the gendered lens where no evidence exists for ethnic minority leaders.

been a commonly used indicator in prior studies with particular focus on accounting (e.g., Return on Equity, Return on Assets) or stock-based measures (e.g., Tobin's Q, investment growth, share price changes) (Haslam et al., 2010; Morgenroth et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2016). Where applicable, context-specific performance (e.g., win/loss record in sport, vote share in politics, etc.) has been utilised to assess organisational precarity when financial performance is not readily available or critically less significant on perceptions of performance. For example, Cook and Glass (2013a) used a team's win/loss records in their study of sport leadership appointments, while Aelenei et al. (2020), Kulich et al. (2014), and Robinson et al. (2021) examined party vote share in constituent candidate appointments. Despite the specific measure used, precarious leadership has always been conceptualised at the organisation-level (Morgenroth et al., 2020). This makes sense, as the glass cliff phenomenon is typically defined as a response to an organisation-wide crisis, such as a reputational threat or a period of poor performance. Within this organisational-level conceptualisation, a critical distinction can be made between measures that are fixed and those that are more perceptual (Haslam et al., 2010).

Organisational performance is a multidimensional construct with few studies in the management literature applying a singular, uniform definition (Kirby, 2005; Richard et al., 2009). However, organisations tend to default to comparable and compatible data defined by financial ratios (e.g., Return on Assets (ROA), Return on Equity (ROE)) found in published organisation statements when communicating organisational performance (Singh et al., 2015). In a similar fashion, the use of comparable accounting-based performance measures are prominent in the glass cliff literature to establish organisational precarity (Morgenroth et al., 2020). However, challenges arise

in using accounting-based, organisation-level performance measurements (Singh et al., 2015). Financial data often masks the underlying KPIs and internal accounting systems used to calculate those results. For example, Richard and colleagues (2009) highlighted that varying choices surrounding accountancy principles (e.g., inventory or depreciation) can undermine how performance is operationalised and reported over time. Consequently, research, particularly within management contexts, suggests that the glass cliff effect is less pronounced when organisational performance is assessed using accounting-based measures. In contrast, market-based performance measures, such as stock price expectations, incorporate financial outcomes as well as investor sentiments and perceptions making them more susceptible to subjective interpretation (Morgenroth et al., 2020). This subjectivity may better capture the psychological processes thought to underpin the glass cliff, such as decision making bias.

Given that the glass cliff concerns the conditions under which leadership appointments are made, it is inherently influenced by psychological dynamics such as prejudice (Ryan & Haslam, 2005) and signalling (Spence, 1973). Accordingly, psychological dynamics should be considered when selecting performance measures against which the glass cliff is tested (Haslam et al., 2010). Capturing elements of psychological dynamics, market-based measures have been used in the glass cliff literature as they are inclusive of financial performance as well as behaviours, perceptions, and stereotypes (Devers et al., 2007; Haslam et al., 2010). For instance, Tobin's Q is a market-based measure commonly used in the glass cliff literature that accounts for projections of investor behaviour and future results (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Ihmels et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024). Market-based measures, such as Tobin's Q, tend to reflect a broader scope of organisational factors, such as brand value and human capital,

missing from accounting-based financial considerations (Haslam et al., 2010; Vomberg et al., 2014). While market-based measures account for elements of perceptual dynamics, they still primarily reflect perceptions at an organisation-level. They do not account for interpersonal bias that may also influence leadership appointment decisions at the individual-level (Angelovski et al., 2016).

Despite evidence suggesting that interpersonal bias affects leadership appointment outcomes (Hardy et al., 2021; Rosette et al., 2008; Vial et al., 2019), few studies have considered the legacy impact of the preceding leader on the appointment of a successor (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Morgenroth et al., 2020). Recent evidence suggests that predecessor-successor (dis)similarity affects the successor appointment process based on how well the predecessor performed. Specifically, as in the racial transference literature outlined in Chapter 2, Preston and Carton (2024) found that ethnic dissimilarity is preferred in poor performing leadership contexts as defined by the preceding leader's win-loss record, such that ethnic minority leaders would be preferred for poorly performing organisations when the predecessor was White. In contrast, strongly performing predecessors instigated a preference for same ethnicity successors. Given these findings, predecessor-level performance measures, such as the performance outcome from the preceding leader's tenure, may better predict the glass cliff phenomenon than organisation-level measures<sup>5</sup>. As previously discussed,

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<sup>5</sup> While predecessor-successor ethnic dissimilarity is preferred following poor performance (Preston & Carton, 2024), this dissimilarity preference should be understood in the context of ongoing leadership representation asymmetries. In theory, the Preston & Carton racial transference model (2024) implies that a poor performing ethnic minority leader increases the likelihood of a White successor. However, given the continued underrepresentation of ethnic minority leaders in leadership roles, such ethnic minority predecessor - White successor scenarios remains uncommon. As a result, the dissimilarity preference does not negate the glass cliff hypothesis, but rather amplifies it. With White leaders more likely to precede (in general but also) poor organisational performance, ethnic minority leaders remain disproportionately exposed to the glass cliff.

market-based performance measures, compared to accounting-based indicators, are more likely to sustain conditions associated with the glass cliff due to their perceptual nature (Haslam et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2016). This is because the inherent subjectivity of these measures creates the psychological space for human biases and attributions to influence leadership appointment decisions, which is a key mechanism of the glass cliff phenomenon. Building on this, predecessor-level performance may further amplify the likelihood of glass cliff appointments, as it embeds even greater perceptual dynamics such as narrative framing and interpersonal attributions. Predecessor-level measures contextualise how stakeholders perceive and subsequently react to the preceding leader's performance when making successor appointments, a process influenced by the romance of leadership effect (Meindl et al., 1985), where organisational outcomes are often attributed directly to the leader. Rather than responding solely to organisational conditions, stakeholders would respond to perceived leadership failure, particularly that of typical (i.e., White) leaders, thereby increasing the likelihood that an ethnic minority leader will be appointed following poor performance.

In sum, organisation-level performance measures, both accounting- and market-based, offer a static snapshot of organisational performance devoid of the leader who led them to those conditions. Predecessor-level performance measures capture a more dynamic and psychologically-influenced perspective on role precarity. As the glass cliff is a phenomenon that is underpinned by social psychological mechanisms, the choice of organisational performance metric, fixed organisation- or predecessor-level, will be a critical factor in testing for glass cliff effects. I will now explore how predecessor-level performance factors may explain an underlying motivation for the glass cliff phenomenon.

**Table 3.1**

*Summary of Organisational Performance Measures in Glass Cliff Research*

| <b>Measure Type</b>                    | <b>Examples</b>  | <b>Studies Featured</b>                       |
|--|--|---|
| Accounting-based performance measures  | Return on Assets (ROA),<br>Return on Equity (ROE)  | Haslam et al. (2010); Ryan et al. (2016)      |
| Market-based performance measures      | Tobin's Q, share price growth, investor confidence   | Bechtoldt et al. (2019); Ihmels et al. (2023) |
| Context-specific performance measures  | Win/loss record (sport), vote share (politics)   | Cook & Glass (2013a); Aelenei et al. (2020)   |
| Predecessor-level performance measures | Predecessor tenure<br>accounting and market performance, predecessor tenure compared to average historic predecessor results | Preston & Carton (2024)                       |

**Organisational Motivation Behind the Glass Cliff.** The multi-dimensionality inherent in the glass cliff literature makes it challenging to disambiguate the motivations for such a phenomenon (Ryan et al., 2016). The two preeminent perspectives on what motivates the glass cliff phenomenon are hostile (Acar & Sümer,

2018; Ryan & Haslam, 2005) and signalling change motivations (Kulich et al., 2015; Reinwald et al., 2022; Takizawa et al., 2024). Evidence supporting each motivational perspective is mixed based on the type of atypical leader under consideration (Morgenroth et al., 2020). In the following, I explore the evidence related to each motivation for the glass cliff starting with hostile motivations.

***Hostile Motivation of the Glass Cliff.*** As previously reviewed, LCT suggests that ethnic minority and women leaders do not fit conceptualisations of the leader prototype (Lord et al., 1984; Lu, 2024; Rosette et al., 2008; Sewell et al., 2022). Despite a lack of fit to the leader category, women are seen to be better suited than men to passive leadership roles, which leaves women leaders to endure periods of poor performance or, worse, serve as organisational scapegoats (Ryan et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2016). For instance, when leadership roles were presented to participants as passive (i.e., enduring crisis or taking responsibility for poor performance), women leaders (compared to male leaders) were overwhelmingly preferred; an effect that disappeared for more agentic (i.e., spokesperson or improving the organisation) leadership role types (Ryan et al., 2011; Study 3). Regarding ethnic minority groups, Gündemir and colleagues (2019) identified that Asian American leaders were preferred in precarious leadership roles due to a cultural proclivity towards self-sacrifice, a trait typically viewed positively in leadership contexts. While this association may benefit the group in terms of perceived leader fit, such preferences can also reflect a hostile motivation (i.e., a strategic appointment of leaders who are seen as more willing to absorb blame or be scapegoated, particularly in high-risk roles that demand a “sacrificial” figure). However, limited direct evidence for a hostile or prejudice motivation could be identified in a recent glass cliff meta-analysis (Morgenroth et al., 2020). While hostile

motivations provide one explanation for the glass cliff, this perspective fails to consider organisational incentives that would rationally dissuade an organisation to scapegoat an incoming leader which would only perpetuate failure in the near term (Thomas & Bodet, 2013). An alternative explanation for the appointment of an ethnic minority leader in times of crisis centers on the intent to signal a clear departure from prior leadership failures. Accordingly, organisations would seek to restore legitimacy and demonstrate change through their leadership appointment (Kulich et al., 2018). Given that ethnic minority leaders represent a visible and potentially costly deviation from traditional leadership norms, such appointments may function as a strategic signal of organisational transformation (Takizawa et al., 2024). The signalling motivation is explored in the following section.

***Signalling Motivation Behind the Glass Cliff.*** Signalling theory has broad application in the management context to ameliorate information asymmetry inherent across a range of organisational activities, such as hiring (Connelly et al., 2010). For signals to be effective, for example in the hiring process, the signaler (the role candidate) must put forth the desired signal (e.g., education, work experience, etc.) in an observable way that demonstrates high cost (e.g., financial cost, time cost, etc.) to the signaler (Spence, 1973). For example, research identified that organisations configure diverse corporate boards to communicate social values to stakeholders (Miller & Del Carmen Triana, 2009). In this example, diversity is both highly observable and attained at a great time (i.e., to broaden search criteria) and reputational cost (i.e., risk of external backlash) making the signal more efficacious. As such, the glass cliff phenomenon aligns with the necessary components of effective signalling. In organisations appointing ethnic minority leaders to precarious leadership roles, they

create highly visible and costly deviations from prototypical leadership. These appointments would then serve to signal change to external stakeholders, reinforcing an organisation's commitment to a turnaround, whether genuine or symbolic. However, evidence suggests that such signals may not always be interpreted by stakeholders positively. Ihmels and colleagues (2023) found that stakeholders may perceive atypical leadership appointments in precarious organisational contexts as reputationally damaging, particularly in high-visibility organisations. This demonstrates that while glass cliff appointments structurally fit the precursors to effective signalling, the perceived legitimacy of such a signal is shaped by context and interpretation.

The glass cliff signalling motivation has produced mixed results depending on organisational context and leader identity under study (Kulich et al., 2018; Morgenroth et al., 2020; Takizawa et al., 2024). For instance, Robinson and colleagues (2024) found that conservative political parties, compared to progressive ones, are more likely to appoint ethnic minority and women candidates to hard-to-win constituencies as a strategic signal of alignment with societal values not traditionally associated with their platforms. Similarly, evidence suggests that women are preferred for precarious leadership roles based on their ability to signal change to external stakeholders rather than their actual leadership credentials (Kulich et al., 2015; Reinwald et al., 2022). Beyond perceived skill level, evidence also suggests that highly visible (Shemla et al., 2024) or high-attention organisational crises (Takizawa et al., 2024) increase the likelihood of appointing women leaders. For example, Reinwald and colleagues (2022) analysed 26,156 leadership appointments and found that the likelihood of glass cliff appointments for women leaders increased in organisations with high investor attention. However, the examination of the signalling motivation to ethnic minority leaders has

produced contrasting results. Takizawa and colleagues (2024) found that ethnic minority leaders were preferred for low attention crisis compared to high attention and no crisis contexts. This variation in signalling patterns suggests that gender and ethnic identity do not function as interchangeable symbols in leadership appointments. Instead, signalling effects appear to be contingent on external pressures (e.g., risk and reputation; Musteen et al., 2010) and organisational dynamics (e.g., visibility & size; Kharouf et al., 2020). This highlights the need for more focused research on how ethnicity, specifically, operates in these contexts, as it is distinct from gender. To better understand these signalling dynamics, the next section explores key boundary conditions that may shape how the glass cliff develops for ethnic minority leaders.

### **3.2 Exploring Novel Boundary Conditions for Precarious Leadership**

#### **Appointments**

In the following section, I explore two novel boundary conditions for the glass cliff phenomenon framed through the lens of signalling. First, organisational ranking is introduced as a new construct and a potential moderator capturing a firm's comparative market position. I argue that an organisation's ranking, as a clear signal of its visibility, familiarity, and size, influences how stakeholders perceive the severity of its precarity (Aguiar-Noury & Garcia-del-Barrio, 2022; Szymanski, 2000). This, in turn, could shift leadership category preferences toward ethnic minority leaders, as their appointment serves as a strategic and highly visible signal of change with increased benefit for lower ranked organisations (Kharouf et al., 2020). Second, I introduce a new leadership type to the glass cliff literature: interim leadership. Given interim leadership appointments are powerful signals in precarious organisational contexts (Connelly et al., 2016; Mooney et al., 2016), the identity of the interim leader becomes a key signal to

stakeholders about an organisation's future direction. Both boundary conditions are discussed in turn.

### ***3.2.1 Organisational Ranking***

Evidence for the glass cliff phenomenon is dependent on organisational realities, such as visibility, that increase the likelihood of ethnic minority appointments to precarious leadership roles (Robinson et al., 2024). As reviewed in the last section, crisis and organisational visibility impacts the prevalence of the glass cliff (Kulich et al., 2015; Kulich et al., 2018; Reinwald et al., 2022; Takizawa et al., 2024). In addition to visibility, management research has identified related, but distinct factors that differentially impact leadership appointments: familiarity and organisation size. Through the aggregation of these three factors, visibility, familiarity, and size, I conceptualised the construct of organisational ranking to test within the glass cliff context. I will first look at organisation size and how this may impact the preference for ethnic minority leaders in precarious leadership roles.

The tendency of management research to over-utilise large organisations in research has led to the 'large firm bias' that fails to integrate the peculiarities of small to medium size organisations (Harney, 2021). The large firm bias disregards the resource, organisational structure, and financial differences found between organisations of varying sizes (Boselie et al., 2005). Evidence suggests that organisation size differentially impacts recruitment and hiring processes within organisations (Barber et al., 1999; Harney, 2021; Peltokorpi & Jintae Froese, 2015). For instance, large organisations operationalise recruitment through formal, well-resourced, and bureaucratic processes (Barber et al., 1999). In contrast, small to medium sized organisations have strong incentives for more informal and emergent methods of

recruitment (Beaver & Prince, 2004; Harney, 2021). Evidence suggests that smaller organisations are more likely to rely on subjective, personality, and motivational indicators of job qualifications to make hiring decisions (Barber et al., 1999). In contrast, larger organisations must account for institutional pressures and defensibility of decisions when hiring (Barber et al., 1999). This preference or incentive smaller firms have for emergent and informal recruitment practices highly influenced by perceptual (as opposed to structured) decision-making aligns with the perceptual dynamics known to increase the prevalence of the glass cliff. Linked to organisation size, I turn to organisational familiarity and how high and low familiarity organisations differ in incentives when making leadership appointment decisions.

Low organisational familiarity and size affect perceptions of legitimacy and status in the job market (Harney, 2021). An organisation's level of familiarity influences the recruitment and selection methods available to it. For example, organisations with strong employer brands are perceived more favorably by job seekers, allowing these organisations to attract applicants more effectively than those of organisations with weaker brands (Cable & Turban, 2003). High familiarity has also been shown to heighten applicant attraction to posted roles which increases the total number of applicants available for selection (Turban, 2001). Much like organisational size, familiarity has been demonstrated to impact the recruitment and selection processes of organisations both in how the organisation recruits, where they recruit, and who they recruit for roles.

Taken together, I merge findings from the organisation size, visibility, and familiarity literature to form a variable of organisation's relative ranking within their competitive environment. For example in the sporting context, club performance,

revenue, and media visibility are interrelated, with larger clubs tending to achieve higher performance, revenue, and consequently, greater media visibility (Aguiar-Noury & Garcia-del-Barrio, 2022). Organisations with high ranking (e.g., large, well-known organisations) have greater institutional resources, reducing their need to use leadership appointments as a means of signalling change. Conversely, low-ranked organisations (e.g., smaller, less familiar organisations) have stronger incentives to leverage leadership appointments as strategic signals.

Not only are less familiar organisations incentivised to utilise strategic signals, evidence suggests that they receive more benefit in doing so (Kharouf et al., 2020). Lower familiarity organisations that experience poor performance have been found to receive more benefit from strong signals (e.g., appointing an ethnic minority leader) than that of higher familiarity organisations. Given that ethnic minority leadership appointments are often more publicised and interpreted as radical shifts from traditional leadership norms, such appointments serve as visible and potentially costly organisational signals (Kulich et al., 2018). To investigate the dynamics around the glass cliff and organisational ranking, the present study hypothesises the following (full model presented in Figure 3.1) and will be analysed in Chapters 5 and 6:

**Hypothesis 2:** Organisational ranking accounts for the increased likelihood of an ethnic minority leader being appointed to precarious leadership roles, such that the effect is more prevalent when organisational ranking is lower.

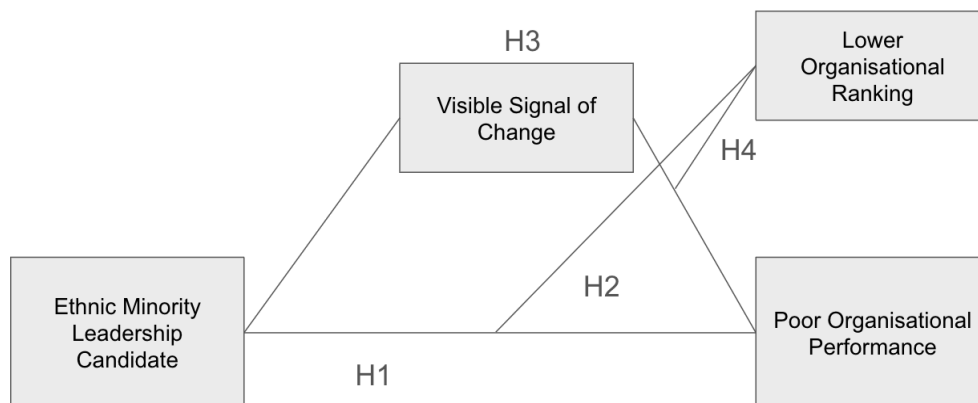
**Hypothesis 3:** The relationship between poor organisational performance and leadership candidate ethnicity will be mediated by

the organisation's desire to visibly signal change in terms of signalling an intent to alter leadership styles.

**Hypothesis 4:** The mediation effect as per Hypothesis 3 will be moderated by organisational ranking, such that lower-ranked, compared to higher-ranked, organisations are more likely to select ethnic minority leadership candidates for the poorly (vs strongly) performing organisation as a signal of change to stakeholders.

**Figure 3.1**

*Organisational Ranking & Signalling Hypotheses Proposed Model*



### **3.2.2 Leadership Appointment Type**

CEO turnover across 13 major global indices (e.g., S&P 500, FTSE 100, and Nikkei 225) reached 202 leaders in 2024, a 9% year-over-year increase (Russell Reynolds, 2025). As leader turnover rises, organisations increasingly rely on interim leaders, defined by short-term and time-limited role occupancy, in succession planning (Farquhar, 1995). A recent survey found that 13% of all CEO transitions included the

appointment of an interim leader in 2024 (Challenger, Gray, & Christmas, Inc., 2024).

The extant management literature has primarily focused on permanent leadership structures (Giambatista et al., 2005; Schepker et al., 2017). The role of interim leadership appointments in shaping organisational outcomes is still an emerging area of inquiry (Fisher et al., 2024). The following section examines the known outcomes of interim leadership and establishes a link between interim leadership and the glass cliff.

**Interim Leadership Appointments.** With the increasing prevalence of interim leadership appointments, research related to this leadership type has accelerated in kind. Despite the increased attention, agreed terminology, measurement, and methodological consistency is lacking in the interim leadership literature (Fisher et al., 2024). For the purposes of the present research, I applied the following definition of interim leadership, “a case where the title of the leader (e.g., CEO) is vacated by the incumbent and the board of directors [...] designate a particular individual as “Interim” or “Acting” leader” (Ballinger & Marcel, 2009, p. 262). Interim leadership appointments typically occur for two reasons: narrow skill requirements (e.g., crisis management, continuity of business) or succession planning failure (Mooney et al., 2013, Mooney et al., 2016). Due to the typically rushed or unplanned nature of interim leadership appointments, evidence suggests that interim leadership appointments can lead to negative organisational outcomes related to financial performance (Ballinger & Marcel, 2009), employee turnover (Gangloff et al., 2016), and investor reaction (Hendricks et al., 2024). From the precarious connotations attached to interim leadership, I will now explore why ethnic minority leaders may be preferred for interim leadership as a proxy for the glass cliff.

While extensive research has explored the glass cliff within permanent leadership contexts, no attention has been given to its relevance in interim leadership. However, both the glass cliff and interim leadership share a number of key features. First, interim leadership predominantly follows organisational failure, or a failure of organisational succession planning (Fisher et al., 2024; Mooney et al., 2016). As the glass cliff derives from precarious leadership opportunities, interim leadership itself can be viewed as inherently precarious. From a signalling perspective, interim leaders have been demonstrated to represent negative outward signals to stakeholders (Kavadis et al., 2022). A preference for strong signals of change (e.g., an appointment of an ethnic minority leader) could be used to counteract negative organisational signals to stakeholders.

Second, findings suggest that interim leaders can serve as a test for prospective leaders particularly for those with ‘uncertain managerial skills’ (He & Zhu, 2020). As ethnic minority leaders often lack positive perceptions around managerial competency and skills (Gündemir et al., 2019; Rosette et al., 2008), one could expect a preference for ethnic minority leaders in interim roles to occur in a “test-and-learn” capacity. Although this remains an unexplored area, existing research would suggest that a meaningful intersection between interim leadership and glass cliff warrants further investigation. Moreover, examining the variations found in interim leadership may uncover additional evidence of a preference for ethnic minority leadership appointments to such temporary and often precarious roles.

Building on Lord et al.'s (1984) hierarchical conceptualisation of the leader category, “interim leadership” can be understood as a subordinate category within the broader, superordinate “leader” category. Importantly, it also comprises its own

subordinate categories, reflecting variation within interim leadership itself (He & Zhu, 2020; Mooney et al., 2012). For example, Mooney and colleagues (2012) proposed that the interim leader category contains six interim leader types, which range in complexity and responsibility: a seat warmer, contender, groomer, marketer, fixer, and cleaner (see Table 3.2 for full detail).

**Table 3.2**  
*Overview of Mooney et al. (2012) Interim Leadership Role Types*

| Role Type   | Definition  |
|-------------|---|
| Seat Warmer | Manages the day to day operations until the board secures an external replacement.                      |
| Contender   | Operates as a permanent CEO would, proving to the board s/he is a good fit.                             |
| Groomer     | Acts as the spokesperson and manages external stakeholders while grooming the replacement.              |
| Marketer    | Sets the company up for an Initial Public Offering or a sale, negotiating with potential future owners. |
| Fixer       | Repairs the existing companies, whether strategically or operationally                                  |
| Cleaner     | Divests parts of the business or entire segments  |

Research confirms that the proposed interim leader types are demonstrable in organisational settings. He and Zhu (2020) found that interim leadership was used in a “seat warmer” manner but also as a testing ground for potential “contenders”. The proposed interim leader types also differ in levels of scrutiny and precarity. In addition

to seat warmers, Mooney and colleagues (2012) proposed that groomers and cleaners have little likelihood of taking the leadership role on a permanent basis, whereas, contenders, marketers, and fixers have more scope for demonstrating leadership potential. Research suggests that the positioning of interim leaders (i.e., scope of responsibility) can attenuate any negative external perception associated with interim leadership appointments (Kavadis et al., 2022). Thus, the external positioning of an interim leader as occupying a specific type of interim role (e.g., seat warmer, contender, etc.) should impact the typicality of the appointed interim leader. Based on the review above, I propose the following hypotheses regarding the glass cliff, ethnic minority leaders, and interim leadership:

**Hypothesis 5:** Ethnic minority leadership candidates will be more likely to be selected for interim, compared to permanent, leadership positions; a pattern not observed for their White counterparts.

**Hypothesis 6:** Ethnic minority leadership candidates will be more likely to be selected for leadership roles as evaluators' perceived precariousness of the role increases. This relationship will not be expected to emerge for ethnic majority leadership candidates.

**Hypothesis 7:** The relationship between leadership candidate ethnicity and selection for glass cliff leadership roles is moderated by interim leadership role type, such that ethnic minority leadership candidates are more likely to be selected for glass cliff leadership roles in precarious interim leadership appointments (i.e., no chance of permanent appointment) compared to secure (i.e., known chance for permanent appointment) and no information appointments.

### **3.3 Evidence Against the Phenomenon**

To provide a balanced understanding of the glass cliff, it is equally important to consider the circumstances in which no evidence for the effect has been found. The extant research indicates that the research design (i.e., experimental within-participant, experimental between-participant, or archival data) impacts the effect size and occurrence of the glass cliff (Morgenroth et al., 2020). While Chapter 4 will elaborate on the methodological approach of the present research, it is worth highlighting that addressing methodological challenges, such as endogeneity, reverse causality, and omitted variable bias, is essential when working with glass cliff archival data. These concerns have often been neglected in prior research (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Reinwald et al., 2022). In the following section, I will discuss this methodological challenge related to glass cliff studies, which perhaps sheds light on the mixed results in the extant literature.

#### ***3.3.1 Methodological Challenges in Archival Studies***

Archival data studies have prominent use in the glass cliff literature (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Recent studies have called into question the validity of this glass cliff effect due to the methodological strategies utilised in archival data designs (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Li et al., 2024). From a methodological perspective, endogeneity (i.e., the effect of a predictor on the outcome cannot be interpreted because it includes omitted causes; see Antonakis et al., 2010, p. 1087) has often been left unconsidered in the analytical strategies of glass cliff studies (Bechtoldt et al., 2019). The endogeneity challenge in the extant literature has been considered in more recent studies to mixed results (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Li et al., 2024; Reinwald et al., 2022). For example, Bechtoldt and colleagues (2019) used a multi-method analytic strategy to

account for endogeneity, specifically reverse causality and missing variable bias. They deployed matching procedures, instrumental variable analysis, and fixed effect models which could not confirm the glass cliff phenomenon in their analysis of German and UK organisations. Similarly, Li and colleagues (2024) used propensity scoring and regression discontinuity analysis to account for endogeneity, which found contradictory results for the glass cliff. Using this methodological approach, evidence suggested that women were appointed to more profitable firms when market-wide conditions were precarious. Although accounting for endogeneity has led to null or contradictory findings for the glass cliff, studies have applied similar causal methodological techniques to identify the phenomenon. Reinwald and colleagues (2022) utilised regression discontinuity analysis to confirm the glass cliff while accounting for potential confounding variables (e.g., firm culture or industry networks) in their study. In summary, the lack of consideration for endogeneity in archival study design may explain the inconsistent results in the literature. A failure to account for endogeneity has the potential to lead to erroneous conclusions from past findings (Antonakis et al., 2010; Hill et al., 2020), which may partially explain the variation in the extant glass cliff literature.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the glass cliff phenomenon (Ryan & Haslam, 2005) which introduces the preference for ethnic minority leaders, compared to their White counterparts, for precarious leadership roles. Following, the context-dependent nature of the phenomenon was discussed to introduce the importance of how organisational performance is conceptualised and measured (Haslam et al., 2010), potential motivating factors (Kulich et al., 2015), and boundary conditions of the

## The Glass Cliff and Ethnic Minority Leaders

glass cliff (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2016). Last, the lack of consideration for endogeneity inherent in the glass cliff and how that may call into question prior findings was discussed (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Li et al., 2024; Reinwald et al., 2022).

The chapter that follows moves on to consider the methodological strategies applied in the present research.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

In this chapter, the methodology of the present research will be outlined in addressing the aforementioned hypotheses. First, the research philosophy guiding the proposed research will be discussed. Next, the multimethod quantitative research design is introduced, with focus on archival research and experimental methods. Following, the research sampling strategy will be explored. Lastly, I outline the data collection and analysis strategies utilised in the present research.

### **4.1 Philosophical Foundations**

Leadership research attracts multi-disciplinary scholars from fields such as management, psychology, and sociology to address key organisational questions (Gardner et al., 2020; Lord et al., 2017). Rooted in changes from the 1970s and 1980s, the growth of socio-cognitive approaches to leadership advanced research methodology to capture such complex phenomena related to ethnicity and the leadership category (Lord et al., 1984; Lord et al., 2017). What has remained fairly constant through the development of the leadership research methodology is the hegemony of quantitative studies (Alvesson, 1996; Gardner et al., 2020; Zyphur et al., 2015; Zyphur & Pierides, 2019). Despite rarely being explicitly referenced in the quantitative glass cliff and leadership studies, the link between quantitative methods and the positivist research philosophy is evident (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Case et al., 2011; Rahi, 2017).

Research philosophy shapes how one develops their research, decides on methods and interprets results (Crotty, 1998). Broadly defined, a research philosophy is “the system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge”

(Saunders et al., 2009, p. 130). The positivist philosophy utilises a philosophical preference for observable science without influence from bias and opinion yielding an objective and verifiable reality (Nyein et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2009). To discuss the philosophical fit between positivism and the glass cliff phenomenon, the following section will explore the ontological, epistemological, methodological alignment between positivist philosophy and the present research.

When considering ontology within the framework of the research philosophy, the nature in which reality is perceived impacts the design of your work (Guba, 1990; Saunders et al., 2009). From a positivist perspective, reality or being is an observable construct that lies external to the researcher (Crotty, 1998). Additionally, independence between the researcher and subject or data is explicit in the pursuit of knowledge (Karupiah, 2022). With the objectivity and observability inherent in positivistic reasoning, knowledge is the quest for narrow questions to be tested with constraints through formed hypotheses (Creswell et al., 2003). The present research on the glass cliff phenomenon is fundamentally informed by the positivist perspective on independent and verifiable data that proves or disproves the existence of the phenomenon within the context under study (Ryan et al., 2016). Despite variation in study design, the glass cliff phenomenon relies on the constraints of a specific hypothesis around leadership role quality being tested with objective data (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). With ontological alignment, epistemological considerations will now be discussed.

A misalignment between ontological and epistemological assumptions can undermine the clarity of research constructs (Thompson, 2011). According to Saunders and colleagues (2009), epistemological assumptions dictate how data collection

methods are operationalised to align with perceptions of what constitutes acceptable knowledge. Aligning a positivist ontology with epistemology requires a Popperian view on falsification and hypothetico-deductive approaches to knowledge (Popper, 1971, Sprenger, 2011). Therefore, positivist epistemology relies on causal explanation and predictions as well as generalisation as accepted sources of knowledge (Saunders et al., 2009). Methodological assumptions subsequently flow from this epistemological perspective that are rooted in hypothesis-tested, objective results that either falsify or confirm existing knowledge. The present research, following in the broader positivistic tradition of the glass cliff literature, utilises a deductive approach that predicts a preference for ethnic minority leaders to be appointed under precarious organisational conditions. In this context, the glass cliff phenomenon is examined through a hypothetico-deductive framework to test whether such appointment patterns reliably emerge across the specific conditions under investigation. I will next discuss the methodological assumptions that derive from the positivist epistemological perspective.

Although not a universal assumption, positivist philosophy and the quest for observable and objective truth generally rely on quantitative methods (Saunders et al., 2009; Zyphur & Pierides, 2019). Methodological fit, defined as internal consistency between theory, design, and contribution, enhances the ability of research to effectively address particular research questions (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Poor methodological fit can lead to false conclusions through “re-inventing the wheel” on topics that are well understood or the inability to develop strong hypotheses where theory is insufficient (Wellman et al., 2023). Edmondson and McManus (2007) created an association between theory development and methodological selection to help guide fit. For example, deductive methods, typically associated with positivist philosophy, fit

more appropriately to research on developed or mature theory, whereas inductive methods are most appropriate when existing theory is non-existent or developing in explaining connections between constructs (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). As the glass cliff is a well-established phenomenon supported by a substantial body of research with clear hypotheses, predominantly quantitative research designs, and a range of empirical findings (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2016), deductive approaches are suitable for research questions in this field. Following Saunders and colleagues (2009) conceptualisation of methodological selection, the present research will explore a multimethod quantitative approach. The research design will deploy an archival research and experimental design in line with prominent design strategies in the glass cliff literature (Morgenroth et al., 2020).

The application of a positivist, hypothetico-deductive approach (Popper, 1971) methodologically fits the developed theoretical framework of the glass cliff. While qualitative investigations have contributed valuable insight into the glass cliff phenomenon (Glass & Cook, 2016; Glass & Cook, 2019; Peterson, 2015), these studies employ alternative methodologies in-line with Edmonson and McGuire's "intermediate" theory development stage that do not align with systematic theory generalisation principles (Bryman, 2016). The deductive, quantitative approach enables causal inference and the identification of objective statistical patterns required to test the glass cliff hypothesis that also mitigate any bias associated with subjective interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Given the present research seeks confirmatory evidence of the hypothesis that ethnic minority leaders are preferred for precarious leadership roles, rather than any subjective experience related to the phenomenon, this research prioritised empirical measurement, reproducibility, and

statistical validation associated with deductive strategies (Antonakis, 2010). In utilising a positivistic research philosophy, this research ensures objectivity, reliability, and causal inference that adds to glass cliff knowledge as a systematic, rather than anecdotal, phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2009). I will now turn specifically to the selected designs, archival research and experimental vignettes, employed in the present research.

### **4.2 Research Design**

Following the positivist paradigm, the present research explores the causal relationship between ethnic minority leadership appointments and organisational performance using a multi-quantitative design which includes an archival dataset and experimental vignettes. The experimental design is generally viewed as the most failsafe way to generate casual evidence (Antonakis et al., 2019). In the multi-quantitative approach, archival data can enhance the generalisability of results in being easily used to replicate findings, such as the glass cliff, through rich datasets (Das et al., 2018). For the present research, Chapter 5 (Study 1) utilised a non-experimental design in archival research to test the glass cliff hypothesis for ethnic minority leaders. I replicated and extended findings from the archival design through the use of experimental vignettes in Chapter 6 (Studies 2 and 3) and Chapter 7 (Studies 4 and 5). While archival and experimental methods are among the most commonly used quantitative approaches in glass cliff research (Morgenroth et al., 2020), their combined use within a single research programme remains relatively limited (Glass & Cook, 2016). I will look at the specifications and considerations for each in turn.

### **4.2.1 Archival Design**

The digitalisation of data and open data structures within businesses have increased the scope of the archival design to answer various research questions (Saunders et al., 2009). However, archival research has been underutilised in fields such as management, leadership, and social psychology (Aguinis et al., 2007; Barnes et al., 2015; Heng et al., 2018). Archival research features characteristics that outperform or complement other design strategies (Heng et al., 2018). For example, archival datasets often contain large amounts of data which increase statistical power while also reducing the occurrence of Type I (i.e., false positives) and Type II (i.e., false negative) error associated with experimental designs (Barnes et al., 2015; Heng et al., 2018). The structure of archival data also permits the study of socially sensitive phenomena, such as the glass cliff, in avoiding biased self-report data and participants providing socially desirable responses in surveys or experiments (Barnes et al., 2015). A key benefit of archival research is its realism, which enhances external validity by ensuring that observed relationships generalise to real-world contexts (Heng et al., 2018). For example, sports data provides a uniquely transparent and structured environment for testing leadership and performance-related hypotheses through archival data. Standardised performance metrics, clear hierarchical structures, and well-documented decision-making processes make sports an ideal setting for archival research in management and leadership studies (Cook & Glass, 2013a; Fonti et al., 2022; Larrick et al., 2011; Obenauer & Langer, 2019).

Archival research does have limitations that must be considered when implementing such a design strategy. Because archival data is not originally collected for research purposes, construct validity concerns must be addressed (Barnes et al.,

2015). For example, Obenauer and Langer (2019) used National Basketball Association coaching performance data to examine post-appointment tenure and awards, despite award voting data being a byproduct of the award process rather than specifically designed for tenure-related research. When constructing archival databases, researchers must ensure that measures accurately capture constructs under question (Barnes et al., 2015). Triangulating measures across multiple databases can enhance reliability and construct validity (Heng et al., 2018).

While the longitudinal nature of archival research is often considered a strength, it also contains inherent limitations. Longitudinal data may introduce time-related confounders, requiring statistical controls to ensure valid conclusions (Bollen & Brand, 2010). Analytical techniques such as random-effects modeling and instrumental variable analysis help account for time-invariant variables, thereby improving the reliability of findings in archival studies (Antonakis et al., 2010; Bastardo et al., 2023). Despite these methodological advances, archival datasets are not immune to biases. Selection bias may arise if certain individuals or organisations are systematically excluded, while reporting biases in publicly available data may distort findings (Berk, 1983; Heckman, 1979). Researchers must critically assess the completeness and representativeness of archival sources to mitigate these risks.

Archival research does provide a powerful lens for examining real-world patterns, leveraging large datasets, high external validity, and longitudinal insights to test theory that might be difficult to capture through other methods. A reliance on real-world data limits researchers' ability to establish causality without due consideration for appropriate analytical techniques (Antonakis et al., 2010; Wulff et al., 2023). To develop a more comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena,

such as the glass cliff, archival research can be complemented by experimental methods, which allow for controlled hypothesis testing and the isolation of causal mechanisms.

This multimethod approach aligns with the full-cycle research (Chatman & Flynn, 2005) strategy, which advocates for integrating non-experimental with experimental evidence to create a more robust and generalisable research plan. Archival studies can identify real-world patterns that warrant further investigation, while experiments can test the underlying mechanisms that drive these patterns. By combining the external validity of archival research with the internal validity of experimental designs, researchers can bridge the gap between observational insights and causal explanations. The next section explores the role of experimental research in further disentangling the mechanisms behind the glass cliff phenomenon, building on the archival evidence discussed thus far.

### ***4.2.2 Experimental Design***

Experimental design strategies are often referred to as the gold standard for causal inference (Antonakis et al., 2010; Eden, 2017). To ensure causal inference, experiments are designed to test causal hypotheses by manipulating one or more independent variables and measuring one or more dependent variables while enforcing substantial control on all other elements of the design (Fisher, 1955). The use of randomisation and controls creates high internal validity, high reproducibility, and a low number of alternative hypotheses for your design (Podsakoff & Podsakoff, 2019). As part of the present research, experimental vignettes were chosen to test the glass cliff hypothesis.

Experimental vignettes consist of “presenting participants with carefully constructed and realistic scenarios to assess dependent variables” (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014) and is the most used experimental design in the glass cliff literature (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Due to the plausible and structured scenarios created by vignettes, social desirability bias, common in other experimental designs, is reduced due to the separation between the individual and the vignette character each participant is asked to assume (Hughes & Huby, 2002). Particularly when paired with archival research, vignettes increase study realism in offering various contextual detail to real-world decision-making scenarios (Wason et al., 2002). Aguinis and Bradley (2014) highlight two benefits of the vignette design. First, vignettes offer high degrees of experimental control of independent variables and the ability to exclude confounding variables. Second, vignettes also allow for ethically or morally sensitive information to be manipulated, such as prejudice and bias reflected in the glass cliff hypothesis, through hypothetical contexts that create enough space between the sensitive topic and the participant. The main methodological critique of the vignette is the lack of certainty in the level of realism created by the hypothetical scenario (Hughes & Huby, 2002). The advance of iterative learning from prior research as well as the emergence of sophisticated technology (e.g., virtual reality) allow for the creation of immersive, real-world scenarios that remain high in internal validity while also increasing external validity (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). In following the extant glass cliff literature, experimental vignettes were utilised in Chapters 6 and 7 and each study found therein. Specific reference for each vignette scenario, manipulation, randomisation, and analysis can be found in Chapters 6 and 7. I will next move to discuss the research samples utilised in the collection of studies for the present research.

### 4.3 Research Sample

The selection of a sampling method should take into account the heterogeneity of the desired sample, cost, and consideration for the complexity of the research design (Demerouti & Rispens, 2013). With this in mind, the present research utilised a multimethod sampling strategy which included student and crowdsourced industry samples. First, student-recruited samples have been increasingly used in organisational research as this population is easy to access, quick to respond, and relatively inexpensive to obtain (Wheeler et al., 2013). Although student-recruited samples are often critiqued for demographic non-representativeness, research shows that their results do not significantly differ in reliability from those of non-student samples (Wheeler et al., 2013). However, without proper planning, they can introduce selection biases (Sears, 1986). To address this, data were collected from large, cross-disciplinary university programmes to ensure greater sample diversity in student-recruited samples (e.g., Study 2; see Chapter 6 for further detail). Importantly, many participants were enrolled in business-related programmes, some with a focus on human resource management, and thus represent future leaders and decision-makers in organisational contexts, particularly with relevance to personnel selection and leadership evaluation.

Despite the benefit of student-recruited samples, the argument that student samples lack external validity and generalisability persists (Ashraf & Marunka, 2016). To establish robust findings with high generalisability to complement student-recruited samples, the present research ran three studies using adult, working samples through the platform, Prolific. Prolific is an online subject recruitment platform with over 200,000 active users specifically catering to the academic research community (Prolific, n.d.). Online subject recruitment platforms have been found to outperform student samples

while increasing external validity of the findings (Palan & Schitter, 2018). Comparably, Prolific has been found to outperform other online subject recruitment platforms particularly when accounting for participant engagement (Albert & Smilek, 2023). For this reason, I used a dual sample strategy that incorporated the benefits of both student and industry participants in testing the glass cliff phenomenon. Prior to implementing the described sampling strategy, tests for a-prior statistical power were run in the G\*Power application (Faul et al., 2009). Individual sample size requirements were calculated using a priori power analysis for logistic regression with G\*Power (80 percent power,  $\alpha = .05$ ) and are highlighted in the requisite results chapters to follow.

### ***4.3.1 Research Design Ethical Approval***

As part of the Dublin City University research ethics approval process, all experimental studies were granted ethical approval prior to the commencement of data collection (all DCU Research Ethics approval confirmations can be found in Appendix A). Beyond university ethics approval, all studies except Paper 2, Study 1 followed open science framework principles through pre-registration (AsPredicted, n.d.). Confirmation of pre-registration can be found in Appendix B.

Pre-registration and data transparency are increasingly recognised as vital for enhancing the credibility and replicability of findings, particularly in fields such as social psychology (Nosek et al., 2018). While still emerging in organisational psychology and organisational behaviour, adopting these practices strengthens methodological rigour and helps address issues of questionable research practices (Aguinis et al., 2016).

#### **4.4 Data Preparation**

The following two sections will outline the data preparation, outliers and missing data considerations required for the present research. As the present research utilises a multimethod quantitative research strategy, this section will discuss the broader implications of outliers and missing data on the robustness of data analysis and results. In the following section, the ramifications of outliers to the present research will be outlined. Following a discussion of outliers, the treatment of missing data will be highlighted.

##### **4.4.1 Outliers**

Within organisational research, outliers are a pervasive methodological phenomenon to be addressed in designing analytical procedures (Aguinis et al., 2013). Outliers consist of any unit of data (e.g., teams, firms, individuals) that deviates significantly from the majority cluster (Aguinis & Edwards, 2013). The impact of outliers is dependent on the sample size under analysis with smaller sample size estimates more sensitive to the occurrence of one or two outliers (Bollen & Jackman, 1985). A typology of outliers has resulted in three categories which determine how the outlier should be treated: error outliers, interesting outliers, and influential outliers (Aguinis et al., 2013). Error outliers are data points whose distance from the majority cluster is resulting from an inaccuracy. To handle this type of error, the datapoint can be corrected to its accurate form or removed and reported as such. Interesting outliers are accurate data points that often contain valuable information. Relatedly, influential outliers are not only accurate data points but they also impact the model fit or estimate predictions. To handle these accurate outliers, quantitative or statistical methods (e.g., M-estimations or Bayesian statistics) can be used to offer robust findings that account

for outliers assuming they are not removed from the model entirely (Aguinis et al., 2013). These approaches are suitable for regression models, which are currently implemented in the present research. Beyond outliers, another statistical phenomenon, missing data, that impacts the robustness of methodology will be discussed next.

### ***4.4.2 Missing Data***

Challenges around missing data are inherent to quantitative research designs (Rubin, 1976). In any study in which potential participants are permitted opt-out rights, as featured in the present research, missing data is an “ethically unavoidable” data analysis challenge (Graham, 2009). Missing data has been defined as an incomplete data matrix that results when one or more individuals do not respond to one or more survey items (Newman et al., 2009). Missing data can occur at three separate levels: item, construct, and person-level missingness (Newman, 2014). Missing data typically occurs as a result of participant deviation (i.e., intentional or unintentional acts) or technical errors on the part of the research team and their selected mechanisms of collecting responses (Newman, 2014; Rogelberg et al., 2003). To account for the various contexts in which data may be missing, Rubin (1976) proposed a typology of missingness that includes three categories: missing completely at random (MCAR), missing at random (MAR), and missing not at random (MNAR). A simplification of this typology has been described as ignorable (MCAR or MAR) and nonignorable (MNAR) missingness (Graham, 2009). The level and typology of missingness dictates the application of ad-hoc (e.g., listwise and pairwise deletion) or statistical (e.g., maximum likelihood and multiple imputation) methods to address missing data in experimental research. Ad-hoc methods, such as listwise deletion, can be suitable but often come at the cost of loss of statistical power due to unused data (Graham, 2009).

Statistical methods for handling missing data, such as multiple imputation, have become the modern standard and are overwhelmingly preferred over ad hoc techniques (Graham, 2009). These approaches are generally unbiased, maintain statistical power, and produce accurate standard errors (Newman, 2014). In line with the multimethod quantitative design, specific application of missing data techniques will be discussed in the relevant chapters outlining sampling strategies at the study level. I will now follow a similar approach in outlining the overall data analysis strategy deployed in the present research.

### **4.5 Data Analysis Strategy<sup>6</sup>**

Regression analysis is amongst the most popular analytic techniques used in organisational research (LeBreton et al., 2007). This statistical tool investigates and models the relationship between variables and represents an approximation of the functional relationship between variables of interest (Myers et al., 2012). The application of regression analysis is twofold: exploration and prediction (Azen & Budescu, 2003; Johnson & Lebreton, 2004). Through the present research, this study applies regression techniques to explore the existence and pervasiveness of the glass cliff phenomenon while attempting to predict the environments in which the phenomenon may be more pronounced. More directly, the present research utilised moderation regression models to predict the variables which alter the strength of the effect.

Moderation regression models test for the interactive effect of a moderating variable which affects the strength or nature of the relationship between two variables

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<sup>6</sup> Due to the specifications and level of analytical detail described in the individual chapters, this section will solely highlight the broader data analysis strategy and its significance to the overall methodology. Individual test results will be discussed in each chapter as required.

of interest (Dawson, 2013; Stone-Romero et al., 1994). When moderating variables are continuous, moderated multiple regression analysis is typically used to extract information of the moderating effect on the predictor - outcome relationship (Aguinis et al., 2016). For categorical moderators, subgroup analysis is utilised to compare coefficients across the identified categories (Aguinis et al., 2016). Despite the prevalence of moderation analysis in the organisational literature, Type II errors (i.e., falsely concluding there is no significant effect) is problematic in moderated regression analysis (Stone-Romero et al., 1994). Stone-Romero and colleagues (1994) identified the power of moderated regression analysis is affected by total sample size, the difference between within-group correlation coefficients, and the difference in group proportions. Findings suggest that most studies utilising a moderation design are underpowered from a sample size perspective which impacts the likelihood of detecting a significant moderating effect (Aguinis et al., 2016). Additionally, the distribution of cases across moderator subgroups (e.g., ethnic minority vs. White leaders) must be considered, as imbalanced group sizes can reduce statistical power in moderation analysis. Using controls and randomised experimental manipulation keep subgroup proportions equivalent thus reducing the likelihood of Type II error in moderation regression. Lastly in the moderation analysis within each study, simple slope tests (i.e., conditional tests identifying the significant association between regressor and outcome at specific values of the moderator) were conducted to determine meaningful interpretations of the interaction (Hill et al., 2020). Due to the multimethod quantitative strategy utilised in the present research, the following section outlines the specific regression and moderation considerations required in each study.

Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models are commonly used for estimating relationships between variables, including those with bounded outcomes (Wulff et al., 2023). While OLS does not constrain predictions within bounds, it can still provide consistent estimates of average marginal effects when the dependent variable is not near boundary values (Wooldridge, 2010). For OLS estimates to be valid and unbiased, several key assumptions must be met, including linearity, exogeneity (orthogonality), homoscedasticity, and the absence of multicollinearity (Osborne & Waters, 2002). A key concern in non-experimental designs, such as archival studies, is the violation of the exogeneity assumption, that is, the requirement that the independent variables are uncorrelated with the error term (Antonakis et al., 2010). If this assumption is violated, the model suffers from endogeneity, which biases coefficient estimates and compromises causal inference (Hill et al., 2020; Wulff et al., 2023).

While randomised experiments naturally mitigate endogeneity through design-based control, non-experimental studies require statistical techniques to approximate causal inference. One such approach is propensity score matching (PSM), which creates statistically similar treatment and control groups by matching on covariates, thus mimicking random assignment (Antonakis et al., 2010). Propensity scores were estimated using logistic regression, where the treatment assignment (e.g., ethnic minority vs. White manager) was regressed on observed covariates theorised to influence both the treatment and outcome. Matched samples were then created using nearest-neighbor matching without replacement, ensuring that each treated unit was paired with the most similar control unit based on the estimated propensity score. This matching technique creates a proportional sample between groups likely to occur in glass cliff research. The application of matching techniques also protects against Type II

errors (Stone-Romero et al., 1994). Another approach is instrumental variable (IV) estimation, which addresses endogeneity by replacing the problematic regressor with an instrument (i.e., defined as an external variable that influences the endogenous regressor but affects the outcome only through that regressor) (Semadeni et al., 2013). Once a valid instrument is identified, two-stage least squares (2SLS) is typically used for estimation (Hill et al., 2020; Wulff et al., 2023). In Chapter 5, both propensity score matching and instrumental variable analysis using 2SLS were employed to address endogeneity concerns inherent in non-experimental, archival data, particularly within the context of glass cliff research (Antonakis et al., 2010; Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Reinwald et al., 2022). The next section outlines the analytic strategy for Chapters 6 and 7, which report experimental vignette studies, with particular attention to controls for common method bias.

Following a similar analytical approach, the experimental vignette studies utilised moderated regression. Unlike the analytic strategy above, endogeneity is not a major concern when using randomised experimental designs (Antonakis et al., 2010). However, an analytical challenge derived from experimental research is the effect of measurement error on the validity of findings (Podsakoff et al., 2024). The type of measurement error that occurs from the variance being attributable to measurement methods rather than constructs to the measure is called common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In plain language, common method bias arises when all data collected are done using the same method and collection time (Jordan & Troth, 2019). More intricate regression models such as mediation and moderation models are particularly vulnerable to common method bias, as measurement of the outcome regressor, moderator, and mediator variables are all collected from the same source and

at the same point in time (Podsakoff et al., 2019). Common method bias is also most prevalent when the participants lack motivation to respond accurately to the experiment, the experiment is too complex or lengthy, and the commonality of the measurement scales is high (Podsakoff et al., 2024). A failure to address common method bias can lead to bias in the reliability and validity of a measure and can bias parameter estimates between constructs (Jordan & Troth, 2019). Common method bias has been found to enhance the prevalence of Type I and II errors and lead to faulty interpretations of the variance by a regressor (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Preventative procedural tactics have been suggested to help mitigate common method bias. Common method bias can be mitigated through varying scale points throughout the experiment, providing clear, concise, and unambiguous question and response structures, and the use of counterbalance or randomisation in response type (Jordan & Troth, 2019; Podsakoff et al., 2024). The experimental designs for Chapters 6 and 7 utilised the aforementioned preventative measures and post-hoc statistical diagnostics, such as Harman's single-factor test, to assess the potential influence of common method variance on model estimates.

### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the philosophical paradigm and associated methodology utilised to address the present research hypotheses. Under a positivist paradigm, the rationale and methodological alignment for deductive, multimethod quantitative design was justified. Then, the design strategies were discussed. A focus on the complementarity of archival and experimental design through vignette was presented as a full-cycle research strategy. Moving to time horizons, this section highlights the present research capturing both longitudinal and cross-sectional temporal perspectives

## The Glass Cliff and Ethnic Minority Leaders

to test for the glass cliff phenomenon. Finally, data collection and analysis strategies, in line with both the philosophical paradigm and methodological strategies, were introduced. The following three chapters will provide further detail on the individual papers and studies that coalesce into the overall research question and will be discussed in turn.

**Chapter 5: When Predecessors Fail in Professional Football: Ethnic Minority Glass Cliff Appointments and the Moderating Role of Organisational Ranking**

**Abstract**

Research on ethnic minority leadership to date has predominantly focused on access barriers and discrimination. The present study extends this research by investigating the type of leadership roles ethnic minority individuals, in comparison to White individuals, are appointed to. Specifically, we examined (i) whether ethnic minority leaders are more likely than White leaders to be appointed to leadership roles following poor organisational performance, hence offered a ‘glass cliff’ role (Ryan & Haslam, 2005), and (ii) whether this phenomenon particularly occurs in lower ranked organisations compared to higher ranked ones. To test these hypotheses, we drew on two decades of organisational performance data from English professional football, focusing on managerial appointments involving White and ethnic minority leaders. The findings showed evidence of a glass cliff effect for ethnic minority leaders when utilizing measures related to predecessor-level (but not general, fixed organisation-level) performance, which was more pronounced when organisational ranking was lower. These results suggest that ethnic minority leaders are more likely to be appointed when leadership roles are perceived as more precarious, particularly in organisations with lower organisational ranking. We discuss the implications of such results on the glass cliff phenomenon and leadership diversity.

*This chapter is based on: Dempsey, S., Bosak J., & Kulich, C. (in preparation). When predecessors fail in professional football: Ethnic minority glass cliff appointments and the moderating role of organisational ranking.*

## 5.1 Introduction

Marvin Ellison is the only Black CEO to have led two Fortune 500 companies within a career. He has been described as “taking the tough jobs nobody wanted ... and when times are precarious, companies like JCPenney and Lowes call him in” (Raz, 2022). Despite evidence suggesting potential beneficial effects of leadership diversity on corporate governance practices (Cook & Glass, 2014), firm reputation and innovation (Miller & Del Carmen Triana, 2009), and overall firm performance (Hoobler et al., 2016; Jackson & Joshi, 2011; Sieweke et al., 2023; Torchia et al., 2011), ethnic minority individuals remain underrepresented in leadership roles (Adamovic & Leibbrandt, 2023; Rosette et al., 2008)<sup>7</sup>. While previous research has predominantly examined barriers to leadership access and organisational mobility, less is known about the types of roles ethnic minority leaders are ultimately appointed to (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). One leadership context warranting closer attention is the “glass cliff”, characterised by appointments to precarious positions during times of crisis. Research has shown that atypical leaders (i.e., those who deviate from the White male leadership prototype, such as women) are more likely to be appointed following periods of poor organisational performance (Gündemir et al., 2014; Gündemir et al., 2019; Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Schein, 2001). These appointments

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<sup>7</sup> The term "ethnic minority" refers to individuals socially categorised as non-White within the English professional football context (Bradbury & Conricode, 2021). This classification is based on visible characteristics, including skin tone, and reflects conventions in prior sport and organisational discrimination research (Branigan et al., 2013; Gordon et al., 2022). While we acknowledge the diversity within ethnic minority groups, disaggregating our sample by specific ethnic backgrounds was not feasible due to the small number of ethnic minority football managers in the dataset. Such subgroup analyses would lack sufficient statistical power and risk obscuring the broader patterns of underrepresentation we aim to examine. We recognise the limitations of using visible characteristics as a proxy for ethnic identity and discuss these considerations in the Method and Discussion sections.

expose such leaders to increased risk and scrutiny, increasing the likelihood of failure (Haslam & Ryan, 2008).

To date, findings on the glass cliff have been mixed. Some studies showed evidence in support for this phenomenon (e.g., Aelenei et al., 2020; Cook & Glass, 2013a; Ryan & Haslam, 2005) whereas other studies found no evidence or even contradictory evidence of the same (Adams et al., 2009; Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Li et al., 2024). These mixed results may be reflective of the contextual nature of the phenomenon (Morgenroth et al., 2020), the limited scope of demographic categories examined (i.e., mostly gender; Ryan et al. 2016), methodological variation in defining precarity (Haslam et al., 2010), and a lack of methodological consistency in addressing endogeneity in prior studies (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Reinwald et al., 2022).

To address these gaps, this study examines the glass cliff phenomenon in the context of ethnic minority leadership, with the aim of identifying the conditions under which such appointments occur and exploring the structural and perceptual factors that may serve as boundary conditions. Drawing on LCT (Lord et al., 1984; Ritter & Lord, 2007; Rosette et al., 2008), which posits that individuals apply a mental representation of their ideal or past leader as a reference for evaluations against a current leader (Lord et al., 1984, 2020), we argue that a preference for demographic dissimilarity following poor predecessor performance may be a mechanism leading to the glass cliff. For example, the ethnicity of a predecessor has been found to impact the likelihood of appointing a successor of similar or dissimilar ethnicity, with positive performance increasing the likelihood of a same-ethnicity successor and negative performance making a demographically dissimilar successor more likely (Preston & Carton, 2024). Accordingly, we conceptualise predecessor-level performance, as opposed to general

organisation-level performance, as a more relevant indicator of leadership role precarity and a more direct driver of demographic preference shifts in leadership appointments.

We further aim to provide insights into the boundary conditions of the phenomenon. Prior work by Ihmels and colleagues (2023) showed that low organisational visibility increased the likelihood of the glass cliff for women leaders, and emerging evidence may suggest a similar pattern for ethnic minority leaders (Takizawa et al., 2024). The preference for ethnic minority leaders in precarious organisations may be influenced by the reduced public attention experienced by low-visibility organisations, which can increase the strategic value of appointing a leader who deviates from traditional norms by attracting attention to organisations that might otherwise go unnoticed (Ihmels et al., 2023; Kharouf et al., 2020). Extending their findings, this research examines whether an organisation's industry ranking, indicative of organisational resources, size, and visibility may be a moderator of the glass cliff for ethnic minority leaders.

This study contributes to the glass cliff literature in three important ways. First, we advance a new account of glass cliff dynamics through the integration of LCT to conceptualize predecessor-level performance as a relevant indicator of role precarity. Second, we move beyond asking whether the glass cliff exists for ethnic minority leaders to examining when the phenomenon is most likely to occur, identifying organisational ranking as a novel contextual moderator. Third, we address two ongoing methodological concerns in the glass cliff literature: first, by accounting for endogeneity in the analysis (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Reinwald et al., 2022), and second, by proposing predecessor-level performance as a more targeted alternative to traditional

organisation-level indicators for identifying precarious leadership positions (Haslam et al., 2010).

### **5.2 The Glass Cliff**

Research on leadership transitions has highlighted the detrimental impact that such changes can have on an organisation, irrespective of the manner or reasons behind their occurrence (Schepker et al., 2017). This is particularly the case in situations following unplanned changes or failure, where successors must contend with legacy restrictions. For example, poor corporate cultures, weakened financial standing, or damaged external reputation follow leadership transitions and heavily influence future organisational performance (Hutzschenreuter et al., 2012). A developing research stream suggests that legacy restrictions may disproportionately affect ethnic minority leaders considering findings that suggest that atypical leaders are more likely than typical leaders (i.e., White men) to be appointed to low rather than high-performing organisations - a phenomenon known as the glass cliff (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). The glass cliff has been identified across sectors such as management (Cook & Glass, 2013b; Mulcahy & Linehan, 2014; Ryan & Haslam, 2005), politics (Kulich et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2021; Robinson et al., 2024; Ryan et al., 2010), law (Ashby et al., 2007), academia (Peterson, 2015; Smith, 2015), and sports (Cook & Glass, 2013a; Wicker et al., 2019) but the literature has predominantly focused on the gender context. Scholars critical of the glass cliff phenomenon cite a lack of a consistent explanation for the motivation underpinning the effect, the limited scope of atypical leadership analyzed, and agreement on method robustness regarding organisational performance

measurement (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Morgenroth et al., 2020). This analysis aims to address the second and third limitation articulated in prior research.

Regarding method robustness, the extant glass cliff literature needs to respond to calls from scholars to address inadequate methodological approaches used in previous archival studies. Select research has raised endogeneity concerns that may impact prior glass cliff results due to omitted variables and reverse causality (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Reinwald et al., 2022). When accounting for causality concerns, support for the glass cliff is mixed. Bechtoldt and colleagues (2019) found that the performance history of German firms prior to the appointment of women leaders was no more negative than found in the appointment of men leaders when addressing endogeneity concerns. In contrast, Reinwald and colleagues (2022) found that poor organisational performance increased the likelihood of women leadership appointments through regression discontinuity designs that address the potential impact of endogeneity. These mixed findings underscore the need for greater methodological precision in glass cliff research, particularly when establishing causal relationships.

Even more importantly, this study expands glass cliff research beyond gender to examine ethnic minority leaders in a unique empirical context—professional football. While prior studies have primarily focused on women in precarious leadership roles (Cook & Glass, 2014; Morgenroth et al., 2020), research on ethnic minority leaders remains sparse and requires further investigation (Gündemir et al., 2019). The football industry provides an ideal setting for such an extension, as it allows for transparent performance assessments of both organisations and their individual leaders. By incorporating ethnicity into glass cliff research within this context, the proposed

findings offer a broader understanding of how the glass cliff phenomenon operates in different demographic and performance-based contexts.

### **Measuring The Glass Cliff**

The glass cliff phenomenon has been examined through various methodological perspectives, with the measurement of organisational precarity emerging as a critical consideration (Haslam et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2016). Glass cliff studies have predominantly relied on objective and fixed organisation-level performance measures (e.g., accounting-based measures) to assess organisational conditions (i.e., poor vs. strong) preceding leadership transitions (Morgenroth et al., 2020). These static measures typically capture organisational performance at singular points in time, such as quarterly financial returns (Ryan et al., 2016; Thomas & Bodet, 2013). For example, Cook and Glass (2013b) identified that ethnic minority leaders and women leaders were more likely to be appointed when the return on equity (ROE) of the organisation was lower using one-, two-, and three-year averages. While select studies using accounting-based performance metrics have failed to identify the glass cliff (Ashby et al., 2007; Bechtoldt et al., 2019), meta-analytical findings have provided empirical support for the glass cliff hypothesis when using such accounting-based performance measures (Morgenroth et al., 2020).

Despite evidence that accounting-based measures of performance may lead to the glass cliff, prior findings suggest that organisation-level, market-based performance measures may be more likely than accounting-based measures to elicit glass cliff effects (Haslam et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2016). Market-based measures, such as Tobin's Q, capture investor perception, behavioral biases, and market reactions to leadership

appointments (Haslam et al., 2010; Ihmels et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024). Because these measures reflect stakeholder sentiment rather than financial realities alone, they permit greater potential for biased decision-making (Rosette et al., 2008). As previous studies have predominantly examined the glass cliff using both accounting- and market-based indicators of organisation-level performance, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 1a:** Ethnic minority leadership candidates, compared to White candidates, will be more likely to be appointed following fixed, organisation-level poor performance preceding the leadership transition.

While market-based performance measures capture perceptual bias in assessing leadership precarity, integrating LCT into the study of the glass cliff introduces a deeper relational perspective on leadership appointments. Specifically, LCT suggests that relational dynamics, such as leader tenure (Obenauer & Langer, 2019) and predecessor-successor ethnic similarity (Preston & Carton, 2024), can influence perceptions of leadership performance (e.g., failure), which in turn shapes the perceived risk inherent in successor appointments.

### **Leadership Categorization and the Glass Cliff**

Leadership typicality and categorization have been identified as possible precursors to the glass cliff phenomenon (Obenauer & Langer, 2019). Prior research has demonstrated that leadership typicality derives from mental models or prototypes that develop over time and functions to signal information to colleagues (Ritter & Lord, 2007). Leadership categorization theory suggests that employees develop and apply a mental representation of their ideal or typical leader as a reference for value judgments against an actual leader (Lord et al., 1984, 2020). Congruence between ideal and actual

leaders is associated with increased positive sentiment, effectiveness, organisational outcomes, and leader-follower exchanges (Lord et al., 2020). However, ethnic minority groups contend with predominantly negative leadership trait associations, such as Black Americans being viewed as lazy, naïve, uneducated (Petsko & Rosette, 2023), and less competent than their White counterparts (Adjei Boateng & Heilman, 2024). Asian professionals, by contrast, may be perceived as technically competent but lacking assertiveness or leadership presence (Sy et al., 2010). Although some ethnic minority subgroups are perceived as high on desirable leadership traits such as warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2007), the association of high competence aligns with that of high talent (skills) rather than intelligence (Walzer & Czopp, 2011). Recent evidence also suggests that negative ethnic group stereotypes tend to outweigh the impact of positive group associations (Adjei Boateng & Heilman, 2024). These group trait associations have been found to negatively impact perceived leadership fit to the “leader” category (Petsko & Rosette, 2023; Rosette et al., 2008; Sy et al., 2010).

Building upon LCT, research on leader transference and more recently racial transference may explain why ethnic minority leaders would be specifically preferred for precarious leadership roles. Leader transference effects explain the activation of trait associations between predecessor and successor if similarity is high (i.e., association of abusive leadership by a predecessor to a demographically similar successor; Ritter & Lord, 2007). Racial transference follows to suggest that transference in leadership appointments is contingent upon racial similarity and the performance of the predecessor (Preston & Carton, 2024). For precarious leadership appointments, poor predecessor performance would lead to the increased likelihood of a racially dissimilar successor. So rather than concentrating on broader organisation-level performance, for

the definition of precarity, we propose to look at the preceding leader's total performance as the measure instigating the glass cliff phenomenon. Here the focus is on the past leader and their traits, as compared to organisational performance more broadly, thus making predecessor performance a focal factor in leadership appointments. To establish more evidence around the effects of predecessor-level performance, we expect:

**Hypothesis 1b:** Ethnic minority leadership candidates, compared to White candidates, will be more likely to be appointed following predecessor-level poor performance preceding the leadership transition at an organisation.

### **Categorisation Preceding Signals in the Glass Cliff**

In general, leadership categorisation functionally serves as a sense making heuristic for individuals to structure their understanding of interpersonal exchanges, such as with leaders and followers (Weick, 1995). The idea of leadership transference encourages poor performing organisations to appoint dissimilar leaders that come from atypical leadership groups, such as ethnic minority groups, with the aim to avoid legacy restrictions permeating across leadership tenures. However, this logic disregards evidence suggesting that transference is a predominately unconscious process that is a reactive rather than a proactive response to poor organisational performance (Andersen et al., 1995; Barsade et al., 2009; Glassman & Andersen, 1999).

In contrast, a proactive strategy that has been deemed a motivation for the glass cliff has been a signalling strategy. Signalling strategies aim to pass through atypical leaders' appointments as signals of imminent change to stakeholders (Kulich et al.,

2015). Signalling theory proposes that signalers (e.g., managers, organisations) purposefully project signals to receivers (e.g., shareholders, stakeholders) when information asymmetry is high to reduce knowledge gaps for potential gain (Spence, 1973). For signals to be effective, they require two fundamental factors: observability and high-cost (Connelly et al., 2010). Under conditions of leadership transitions, the selection of atypical leaders is both highly observable and a source of high reputational cost to the organisation, making such a signal more likely to be received and interpreted (Connelly et al., 2010; Goranova et al., 2007). In integrating categorisation and signalling literature, signalling can be viewed as a conscious manifestation linked to the unconscious psychological process within leadership transference (Ritter & Lord, 2007).

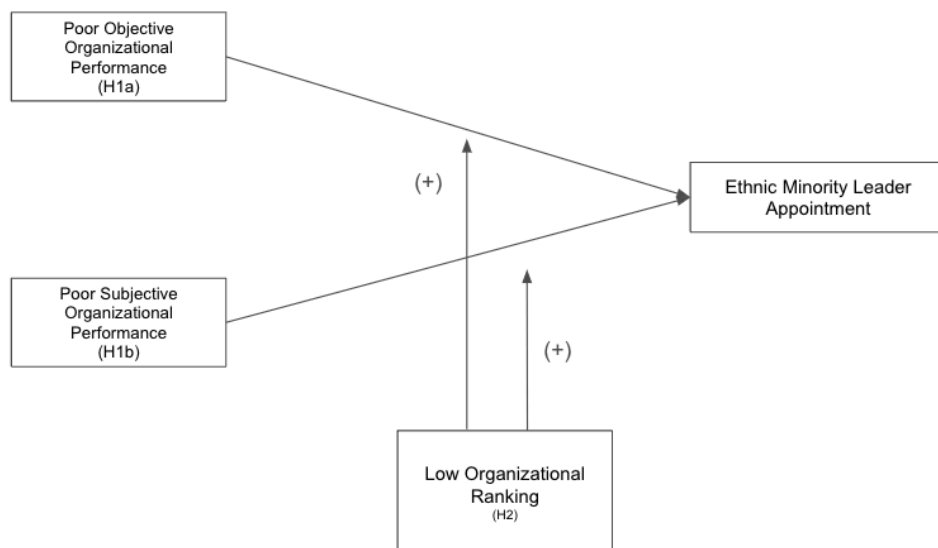
Signalling literature also demonstrates that signal effectiveness may also be impacted by contextual organisation parameters, such as organisation size and brand familiarity (Kharouf et al., 2020). Research suggests that organisations with less visibility see greater benefits from strong signals. For example, smaller organisations deploying signals to seek relationship repair following relationship violations, such as organisational failures, result in increased satisfaction and likelihood of reconciliation compared to larger organisations (Kharouf et al., 2020). Relatedly, Takizawa and colleagues (2024) identified that the glass cliff phenomenon for ethnic minority leaders may be more pronounced during low attention crises compared to high-attention or no crisis contexts. Building on these findings, we expect ethnic minority leaders to be appointed to precarious leadership roles primarily in low-visibility environments, where limited media scrutiny increases the marginal signalling value of deviating from the typical leadership prototype (i.e., White leader). Accordingly, the appointment of an

ethnic minority leader would serve as a more impactful and interpretable signal of change to stakeholders following organisational failure (Kharouf et al., 2020). In contrast, in high-visibility organisations that already attract persistent public attention, individual leadership decisions may be less salient, reducing the signalling impact of such appointments (Fang & Peress, 2009). As such, we conceptualised and measured comparative organisational ranking as reflective of visibility, familiarity, size (Szymanski, 2000). We predict organisational ranking as a potential moderator of the hypothesised link between ethnic minority leadership and precarious leadership roles (see Figure 5.1 for the full model), such that:

**Hypothesis 2:** The increased likelihood of an ethnic minority leader being appointed to precarious leadership roles is more pronounced in lower-ranking organisations compared to higher-ranking ones.

**Figure 5.1**

*Hypothesized Model: Organisational Ranking's Moderation of Organisational Performance and Ethnic Minority Leader Appointments*



### **5.3 Data Collection and Methods**

#### **5.3.1 *The Football Context***

This study examines the four-tiered structure of professional men's football in England, which includes the English Premier League and the English Football Leagues (the Championship, League One, and League Two). The system consists of 92 clubs based in England and Wales. As an industry, the English professional football system generates approximately £6 billion in annual revenue with matches broadcast in 189 markets globally (Deloitte, 2024). The Premier League alone contributes £8 billion in economic value and supports over 90,000 jobs annually in the UK (Premier League, 2024).

This study uses archival data on the performance attributes of club managers in English professional football. The use of archival data on football managers allows for an ecologically valid examination of leadership transitions based on the objective performance metrics found in football. The structured managerial pathways and extensive manager records in football make archival data ideal for studying leadership appointment outcomes while avoiding biases from self-report surveys or experimental manipulations (Obenauer & Langer, 2019). In the sample, the average tenure is slightly above one year ( $M = 1.13$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ). Managerial tenures in professional football are notoriously short, with appointments often dictated by immediate performance outcomes rather than long-term strategic planning. With stringent managerial licensing requirements and a finite number of leadership roles available, football clubs operate in a high-stakes environment where managerial appointments and dismissals are driven by intense performance pressures (Audas et al., 1999; d'Addona & Kind, 2011). This

volatile landscape makes football an ideal setting to examine the intersection of appointed leader ethnicity and precarious leadership positions.

Moreover, a pattern has emerged in English professional football where around 90% of the managers appointed in the dataset were ex-professional players. However, only 4% of managers in English professional football come from an ethnic minority background, despite ethnic minority players making up 43% of the Premier League and 34% of the English Football Leagues (Szymanski, 2023). UK football stakeholders have made a push to close this player-to-manager divide by ethnicity, but to little effect to date (Bradbury & Conricode, 2021). The underrepresentation of ethnic minority managers in English professional football, despite their substantial presence as players, suggests a persistent leadership prototype that associates managerial roles with whiteness. Rosette et al. (2008) highlight how repeated exposure to certain leader demographics influences leadership categorization, potentially affecting selection biases in hiring decisions. This context allows us to examine how leadership transitions in precarious situations intersect with these racialized prototypes.

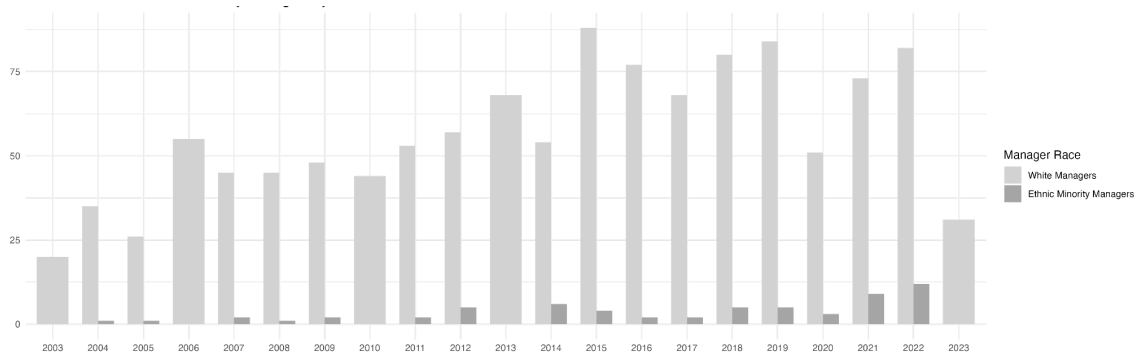
### **5.3.2 Data**

The data used in the current study represents performance data for 1,246 English professional football managers hired by 109 English professional football clubs from 2003 to 2023. Figure 5.2 highlights the distribution of managerial appointments since 2003. The 2003-2004 season marked the announcement of the rebranded football league structure currently in operation, which created consistency in the data collected for this study. The collected data aggregates publicly available information from the following sources, <https://www.transfermarkt.com/> for performance-related data and the

Football Manager video game, Editor version accessed via the Stream App to collect manager skin tone as the proxy for ethnicity. The individual manager data was predominately collected from Transfermarkt, a leading data aggregator in the football industry. Both data sources have been used extensively in sports and management literature (Bryson et al., 2013; Crawford, 2006; Crawford & Gosling, 2009; Herm et al., 2014; Karakaya et al., 2022; Peeters, 2018).

**Figure 5.2**

*Total Number of Managers Appointed to English Professional Football Clubs From 2003-2023*



### 5.3.3 Variables for Analysis

**Fixed, Organisation-level Performance.** Fixed, organisation-level performance was operationalised through points per match averages from the prior 5 and prior 20 matches preceding the leadership transition for each leader appointment. Evidence suggests that the most recent run of results (from the prior 5 and 20 matches) have significant impact on the likelihood of a leadership transition in football (d'Addona & Kind, 2011). These fixed, organisation-level measures capture overall team performance regardless of who was in charge during that period, meaning multiple managers could contribute to the results within the 5- or 20-match periods.

**Predecessor-level Performance.** Predecessor-level performance was operationalized using two metrics: prior manager win rate and within-club prior performance difference. The variable prior manager win rate (PMWR) captures the average points per match achieved by the manager at the club, irrespective of tenure length, preceding the leadership transition based on the global standard of three (3) points for a win, one (1) point for a draw, and zero (0) points for a loss. Prior performance difference (PPD) was established by computing the delta between the prior manager's win rate (PMWR) and the historical mean win rate observed across all preceding managers associated with the organisation prior to the onset of the leadership transition.

**Organisational Ranking.** The professional football league system in England consists of a four-tier hierarchy, with 92 clubs competing across the following divisions, listed from highest to lowest: the Premier League (top tier), the Championship (second tier), League One (third tier), and League Two (fourth tier). To operationalise the moderating variable of organisational ranking, a club's ranking was determined based on the hiring club's ranking within the professional football standings at the time of the leadership transition, with "1" being the top club in the highest division (Premier League) and "92" being the worst club in the lowest division (League Two). Any managers hired outside of the professional leagues were assigned the value, "93".

**Appointed Leader Ethnicity.** Appointed leader ethnicity, the outcome variable in the study, was identified from the Football Manager Editor platform, leveraging the assigned skin tone color on a scale of 1 (light) to 20 (dark) of each manager avatar in the game. Once every manager's skin tone score was collected, a proxy variable for appointed leader ethnicity was created by using a K-Means clustering analysis of skin

tone ratings which identified a natural division at approximately 10.5 on the skin tone scale, supporting the classification of ratings 1-10 as White and 11-20 as ethnic minority (Jain, 2010). While the use of skin tone is an estimation for ethnic minority status, skin tone and ethnicity has been found to linearly correlate with lightness scales such that White skin tones are lighter than ethnic minority skin tones with darker skin tones associated with Black ethnic groups (Branigan et al., 2013; Gordon et al., 2022). From the database, skin tone information was not available for 285 managers leaving 1,246 hiring decisions for analysis with 1,184 managers attributed to the subgroup “White managers” and 62 to the subgroup “ethnic minority managers”. The skin tone data of each avatar in the game is collected and validated by a network of 1,500 researchers employed by Sports Interactive, the parent company that operates the Football Manager video game (Sports Interactive, 2024).

Lastly, the following control variables were considered, total experience, leader age, and prior leader ethnicity. Total experience was controlled to account for skill and reputation factors that influence selection decisions. It was measured as the total number of career matches managed before an appointment. Similarly, we included leader age as a measure likely to impact perceptions of experience in the industry and fit to the “manager” role (Cook & Glass, 2013a). As consideration for racial transference effects (Preston & Carton, 2024), we controlled for the prior leader ethnicity with a dummy variable reflecting ethnic minority managers coded as “1” using the same method as the appointed leader ethnicity variable.

### ***5.3.4 Analytic Strategy***

Bechtoldt and colleagues (2019) identified endogeneity effects that call into question previous glass cliff findings that do not account for reverse causality and

omitted variable bias. In order to alleviate those concerns, matching techniques and instrumental variable analysis were applied to the collected data. Given the non-normality of the overall dataset, we chose a matched pairs analysis to address potential endogeneity effects. Applying Glass and Cook's (2013a) matching approach, we used propensity score nearest neighbor matching based on "Start Year" and "Points Per Job" to create pairs matched on temporality and individual performance. Matching is ideal for non-normally distributed datasets, considering confounding factors and reducing non-normality effects. By comparing data within pairs, we focused on differences, enhancing the reliability of results. This method boosts statistical power by reducing variability, increasing sensitivity to detect significant relationships, and strengthening the findings (Abadie & Imbens, 2016; Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983). The matched pairs dataset included a sample of 62 White managers from 49 clubs and 62 ethnic minority managers from 41 clubs. Balance was achieved on the skills metric of points earned in the role and the start year of the manager appointment.

We further investigated potential endogeneity issues that may arise from unobserved variables in the context of the regression model (Bechtoldt et al., 2019). Initially, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression served as the primary methodological framework as it is deemed to be more efficient than other statistical methods (Sande & Gauche, 2018). To validate the robustness of the findings and address limitations in prior archival glass cliff research, extensive checks for endogeneity were conducted leveraging Instrumental Variable (IV) regression models. A Durbin-Wu-Hausman test, a procedure designed to compare equation error terms to identify analytical efficiency, was systematically applied to ascertain the presence of endogeneity (Nakamura & Nakamura, 1981). When the difference between parameter

estimates in the OLS and IV models was not significant, revealing the absence of endogeneity in the model, we established the suitability of the OLS model and retained OLS results (Sande & Ghosh, 2018).

To address omitted variable bias and simultaneity issues, we implemented Two-Stage Least Squares (2SLS) regression, a widely used IV estimation technique (Antonakis et al., 2010). For example, in Hypothesis 2, the chosen instrument, prior performance difference (PPD), was selected based on its strong correlation with the endogenous predictor, prior manager win rate, while being uncorrelated with the outcome variable. We assessed instrument validity using the Kleibergen-Paap F-statistic, ensuring the instrument met the threshold for strong instruments. The IV analysis was executed using a 2SLS methodology, providing a robust framework to mitigate potential endogeneity biases.

To enhance inference reliability, we applied heteroskedasticity-consistent (HC) robust standard errors (White, 1980) as a precautionary measure to account for potential model misspecification and ensure unbiased standard errors.

This methodological choice was driven by the recognition of omitted variables inherent in glass cliff leadership datasets. This multi-method approach aligns with methods used in glass cliff (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Reinwald et al., 2022) and leadership (Obenauer & Langer, 2019) literature. All analysis was conducted within R and its related packages (R Core Team, 2021; Sekhon, 2011).

## **5.4 Results**

### ***5.4.1 Fixed, Organisation-Level Performance in Measuring the Glass Cliff***

Hypothesis 1a stated that ethnic minority candidates compared to White candidates were more likely to be hired by organisations with recent poor performance as determined by fixed, organisation-level performance measures. Table 5.1 reports the correlation coefficients for the chosen variables under analysis.

**Table 5.1**  
*Correlations Among Study Variables*

|   | <i>M</i>     | <i>SD</i>    | 1         | 2          | 3          | 4          | 5    | 6    | 7          | 8    | 9 |
|---|--------------|--------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------|------|------------|------|---|
| 1 Appointed Leader Ethnicity <sup>A</sup> | .50          | 0.50         | -         |            |            |            |      |      |            |      |   |
| 2 Prior 5 Performance                     | 0.81         | 0.51         | .06       | -          |            |            |      |      |            |      |   |
| 3 Prior 20 Performance                    | 1.07         | 0.34         | -.01      | .61**<br>* | -          |            |      |      |            |      |   |
| 4 Prior Manager Win Rate                  | 1.28         | 0.54         | -.21<br>* | .30**<br>* | .37**<br>* | -          |      |      |            |      |   |
| 5 Prior Performance Difference            | -0.01        | 0.51         | -.17      | .25**      | .31**<br>* | .95**<br>* | -    |      |            |      |   |
| 6 Organisational Ranking                  | 51.01        | 27.99        | -.06      | -.18*      | -.09       | -.20*      | -.10 | -    |            |      |   |
| 7 Age When Hired                          | 45.61        | 7.03         | -.00<br>4 | -.17       | -.03       | .002       | -.01 | -.09 | -          |      |   |
| 8 Total Experience                        | 1,174.8<br>4 | 1,576.0<br>4 | -.15      | .07        | .09        | .09        | .05  | -.04 | .63**<br>* | -    |   |
| 9 Prior Leader Ethnicity <sup>A</sup>     | .05          | 0.21         | .15       | -.04       | -.04       | -.13       | -.11 | .06  | -.07       | -.06 | - |

<sup>a</sup> 0 = White manager and 1 = ethnic minority manager.

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The summary statistics and mean comparisons between the ethnic minority and White managers is presented in Table 5.2 in demonstrating the baseline differences in the leadership appointments found in the data.

**Table 5.2**

*Mean Differences Between Ethnic Minority and White Managers*

| Variable                                  | Full Sample       |                             | Matched Sample    |                             |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
|   | White<br>Managers | Ethnic Minority<br>Managers | White<br>Managers | Ethnic Minority<br>Managers |
|   | Mean (SD)         | Mean (SD)                   | Mean (SD)         | Mean (SD)                   |
| Prior Manager Win Rate <sup>A</sup>       | 1.24 (.55)        | 1.17 (.49)                  | 1.40 (.56)        | 1.17 (.49)**                |
| Prior Performance Difference <sup>B</sup> | -0.05 (.52)       | -0.10 (.44)                 | .07 (.56)         | -0.10 (.44)**               |
| Prior 20 Performance <sup>A</sup>         | 1.13 (.36)        | 1.07 (.38)*                 | 1.08 (.31)        | 1.07 (.38)*                 |
| Prior 5 Performance <sup>A</sup>          | .90 (.58)         | .85 (.55)                   | .78 (.47)         | .85 (.55)                   |
| Total Experience <sup>C</sup>             | 1,711 (2252)      | 946 (1282)                  | 1403 (1805)       | 946 (1282)                  |
| Start Year <sup>D</sup>                   | 2014 (5.48)       | 2017 (4.93)                 | 2017 (4.91)       | 2017 (4.93)                 |
| Age When Hired <sup>E</sup>               | 46.1 (7.87)       | 45.6 (6.59)                 | 45.6 (7.50)       | 45.6 (6.59)                 |
| Organisational Ranking <sup>F</sup>       | 50 (25.4)         | 49 (28)                     | 53 (28)           | 49 (27)                     |
|   | <i>n</i> = 1,184  | <i>n</i> = 62               | <i>n</i> = 62     | <i>n</i> = 62               |

<sup>a</sup> Interval scale, values from 0 to 3 with 3 indicating strongest performance.

<sup>b</sup> Interval scale, (Min = -1.36, Max = 1.85).

<sup>c</sup> Measured in days (Min = 0, Max = 7,677).

<sup>d</sup> Starting from the year 2004

<sup>e</sup> Measured in years (Min = 32.20, Max = 64.37)

<sup>f</sup> Ordinal scale, values from 1 to 93 with 93 indicating lowest ranking

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

To test Hypothesis 1a, we regressed appointed leader ethnicity on organisational performance in the prior 5 and 20 matches proceeding the leadership transition while controlling for leader age, total experience, and prior leader ethnicity. Hypothesis 1a could not be supported at the 5 or 20 match level. At the prior 5 match level, no difference between appointed White and ethnic minority managers could be found ( $B = 0.12$ , Robust  $SE = 0.09$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.29$ ,  $p = .199$ , 95% CI [-0.07, 0.30]). We performed several robustness checks to ensure the reliability of the results. The Breusch-Pagan test for heteroscedasticity indicated the presence of heteroscedasticity ( $BP = 25.55$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) in the model. To address this issue, we employed robust standard errors, which are presented in Table 5.3. To address endogeneity concerns, we also ran a 2SLS IV regression. Prior 5 match performance was instrumented with the variable Prior 20 and yielded no difference between White and ethnic minority leaders ( $B = 0.04$ , Robust  $SE = 0.15$ , Cohen's  $f^2 = 0.07$ ,  $p = .804$ , 95% CI [-0.26, 0.53]).

Similarly, when examining performance over the prior 20 matches (approximately half a season), no significant difference was found in the likelihood of hiring White or ethnic minority managers for organisations with poor prior performance ( $B = 0.03$ , Robust  $SE = 0.13$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.19$ ,  $p = .805$ , 95% CI [-0.24, 0.29]). Similar robustness checks and IV estimators were run using the variable Prior 10, as an

indicator of club performance in the preceding ten matches prior to the appointment, as an instrument for Prior 20 match performance ( $B = 0.19$ , Robust  $SE = 0.17$ , Cohen's  $f^2 = 0.04$ ,  $p = .274$ , 95% CI [-0.15, 0.53]) and were aligned to findings from the Prior 5 match analysis above. Overall, no evidence of a glass cliff was found using organisation-level performance measures; neither short-term (5 matches) nor long-term (20 matches) performance trends were significantly worse before the appointment of ethnic minority managers compared to their White counterparts.

**Table 5.3**

*Logistic Regressions of Organisation-level Performance Measures on Ethnic Minority Leadership Appointments*

|                        | (1)                  | (2)                  | (3)                  | (4)                  |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|                        | OLS                  | IV                   | OLS                  | IV                   |
| Prior 5 Performance    | .12<br>(.09)         | .04<br>(.15)         |                      |                      |
| Prior 20 Performance   |                      |                      | .03<br>(.13)         | .19<br>(.17)         |
| Age When Hired         | .14<br>(.009)        | .01<br>(.009)        | .01<br>(.009)        | .01<br>(.008)        |
| Total Experience       | -.00008*<br>(.00003) | -.00008*<br>(.00005) | -.00007*<br>(.00003) | -.00008*<br>(.00003) |
| Prior Leader Ethnicity | .35<br>(.16)         | .34<br>(.21)         | .34*<br>(.16)        | .36<br>(.21)         |
| Intercept              | -.0007<br>(.39)      | -.0007<br>(.45)      | .03<br>(.40)         | -.19<br>(.42)        |
| Observations           | 124                  | 124                  | 124                  | 124                  |
| $R^2$                  | .068                 | .062                 | .056                 | .045                 |
| $\chi^2$               | 2.189                | 1.777                | 1.765                | 2.031                |

Note. Models 3 and 4 for Prior 20 Performance indicate robust standard errors due to detected heteroskedasticity.

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

#### ***5.4.2 Predecessor-Level Performance in Measuring the Glass Cliff***

To test Hypothesis 1b that ethnic minority leaders were more likely than their White counterparts to be appointed to precarious leadership roles by organisations with recent poor performance as indicated by the predecessor's performance preceding the appointment, two different performance measures were used: prior manager win rate and prior performance difference. First, we tested a performance measure linked to the predecessor's win rate. The results showed that ethnic minority managers were more likely to enter leadership positions following poor prior performance as indicated by the lower prior manager win rate ( $M = 1.15$  points,  $SD = 0.49$ ) than their White counterparts ( $M = 1.39$  points,  $SD = 0.56$ ). This difference was statistically significant ( $p = .011$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.43$ ), indicating a moderate effect size. Similarly, when using an OLS regression, ethnic minority leaders faced worse prior organisational performance indicated by prior manager win rate ( $B = -.17$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ , Cohen's  $d = -2.20$ ,  $p = .046$ , 95% CI [-0.33, -0.003]) than their White counterparts did. Given potential heteroskedasticity in the data, we also estimated HC robust standard errors. With robust standard errors, the effect of prior manager win rate remained significant ( $B = -0.17$ , Robust  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p = .029$ , 95% CI [-0.32, -0.02]). Full results can be found in Table 5.4.

To account for potential endogeneity in the relationship between prior manager win rate and appointed leader ethnicity, we employed a 2SLS IV regression and applied HC robust standard errors. Prior performance difference was used as an instrument for

prior manager win rate. The effect of prior manager win rate on the likelihood of appointing an ethnic minority manager was not statistically significant at conventional levels ( $B = -0.14$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $t = -1.75$ ,  $p = .083$ , 95% CI [-0.43, 0.03]). While the direction of the effect suggests that poor prior manager performance may be associated with a higher likelihood of appointing an ethnic minority manager, the result for the IV regression fails to reach conventional significance. Although the 2SLS IV approach was employed to address endogeneity concerns, the Wu-Hausman test ( $\chi^2(1) = 0.83$ ,  $p = .363$ ) indicated no significant difference between OLS and IV estimates, suggesting that endogeneity may not be a major issue in this model. Overall, the results suggest that ethnic minority managers were more frequently appointed following poor prior manager performance than their White counterparts. While statistical significance varies across models, the consistently negative relationship between prior manager performance and ethnic minority appointments suggests that poor organisational performance, as determined by a predecessor's performance, may play a role in ethnic minority leadership appointments.

A further test of Hypothesis 1b analyzed the difference between predecessor's performance compared to the aggregation of the club's past performance from all leaders in the dataset. Ethnic minority managers ( $M = -0.10$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ) were appointed to organisations with greater negative deviations from historical performance compared to White managers ( $M = 0.07$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ). This difference was not statistically significant ( $p = .052$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.34$ ), indicating a small effect size. Regression analyses using robust standard errors similarly found that negative prior performance differences increased the likelihood of ethnic minority appointments, although the difference did not reach conventional levels of significance ( $B = -0.14$ , Robust  $SE =$

0.08, Cohen's  $d = -0.16$ ,  $p = .087$ , 95% CI [-0.30, 0.02]). Similar to prior analyses, we explored IV regression. We were not able to identify a strong instrument for the 2SLS analysis leading us to consider the Lewbel (2012) heteroskedasticity-based IV approach (Bechtoldt et al., 2019). However, the Breusch-Pagan test for heteroskedasticity ( $BP = 2.53$ ,  $p = .469$ ) indicated no significant heteroskedasticity in the first-stage regression, suggesting that the key assumption required for a Lewbel IV was not met. In the absence of strong instruments or detectable heteroskedasticity, we proceeded with the findings from the OLS regression.

The results are broadly consistent with Hypothesis 1b, showing that ethnic minority managers were more likely to be appointed following poor prior managerial performance when using measures of predecessor's performance, prior manager win rate and prior performance difference. This is confirmed through the significant negative relationship between prior manager win rate and ethnic minority appointments, even after applying robust standard errors. For prior performance difference, the effect was directionally consistent but not statistically significant, suggesting ethnic minority managers tended to be hired in organisations with greater negative deviations from historical performance, though the effect did not reach conventional significance levels.

**Table 5.4**

*Logistic Regressions of Predecessor Performance Measures on Ethnic Minority*

*Leadership Appointments*

|                        | (1)             | (2)            | (3) |
|------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----|
|                        | OLS             | IV             | OLS |
| Prior Manager Win Rate | -0.17*<br>(.08) | -0.14<br>(.09) |     |

|                              |                     |                     |                      |
|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Prior Performance Difference |                     |                     | -.14<br>(.08)        |
| Age When Hired               | .009<br>(.008)      | .009<br>(.008)      | .01<br>(.009)        |
| Total Experience             | -.00006<br>(.00003) | -.00006<br>(.00004) | -.00007*<br>(.00003) |
| Prior Leader Ethnicity       | .29*<br>(.14)       | .30<br>(.21)        | .31*<br>(.14)        |
| Intercept                    | .34<br>(.39)        | .30<br>(.37)        | .10<br>(.37)         |
| Observations                 | 124                 | 124                 | 124                  |
| $R^2$                        | .087                | .086                | .075                 |
| $\chi^2$                     | 2.822               | 2.458               | 2.430                |

---

*Note.* All models indicate robust standard errors due to detected heteroskedasticity. IV analysis for prior performance difference could not be run due to the lack of suitable interest and presence of heteroscedasticity ruling out the Lewbel (2012) instrumenting method.

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

#### ***5.4.3 Organisational Ranking Moderating the Glass Cliff for Ethnic Minority***

##### ***Leaders***

To test Hypothesis 2 that the likelihood of an ethnic minority leader being appointed to precarious leadership roles is more prevalent when organisational ranking is lower rather than higher, we tested OLS and IV models with moderation terms (see Table 5.5 for full results). Based on findings and the instrumenting requirements for IV analysis from Hypothesis 1b, we retained prior manager win rate as the predictor for

this moderation analysis. The results from the moderated OLS model indicate that the interaction term did not reach statistical significance ( $B = -0.005$ , Robust  $SE = 0.003$ , Cohen's  $d = -1.91$ ,  $p = .105$ , 95% CI [-0.01, 0.0006]). However, the negative coefficient suggests a potential trend in which ethnic minority leadership appointments following poor prior managerial performance may be more likely in lower-ranked organisations. A robustness check using HC standard errors yielded a similar pattern ( $B = -0.005$ , Robust  $SE = 0.003$ , Cohen's  $d = -0.23$ ,  $p = .077$ , 95% CI [-0.01, 0.0005]), reinforcing the directional trend. Results for the prior performance difference also failed to reach statistical significance ( $p = .330$ ).

To further examine this relationship, we conducted a simple slopes analysis to assess how organisational ranking moderates the association between poor prior managerial performance and the appointment of ethnic minority managers. The results indicated that in lower-ranked (+1  $SD$ ) organisations, ethnic minority managers were more likely to be appointed to organisations with poor prior managerial performance ( $B = -0.34$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ,  $t = -2.72$ ,  $p = .008$ , 95% CI [-0.57, -0.10]). The results also indicated that in higher-ranked teams (-1  $SD$ ), prior managerial performance did not significantly impact the likelihood of hiring an ethnic minority manager ( $B = -0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $t = -2.31$ ,  $p = .639$ , 95% CI [-0.29, 0.17]). These findings support Hypothesis 2.

To address concerns for endogeneity in the model, we utilized an 2SLS instrumental variable regression model with prior manager win rate instrumented by the prior performance difference. In a first stage test for the strength of the chosen instrument, the Kleibergen and Paap  $F$  statistic for the instrument indicated a highly relevant instrument which was strongly related to the endogenous regressor, prior manager win rate (partial  $F = 1437.66$ ; results above 10 rise above the threshold for

strong instruments) (Kleibergen & Paap, 2006). Second stage IV regression results demonstrated a significant interaction ( $B = -0.007$ , Robust  $SE = 0.003$ ,  $p = .032$ , 95% CI [-0.01, -0.0003]) between organisational ranking and prior manager win rate on the likelihood of appointing an ethnic minority manager. Simple slopes analysis did not reveal clear evidence of a significant effect at any specific organisational ranking level. At higher organisational ranking ( $-1 SD$ ), prior manager win rate was not significantly associated with appointing an ethnic minority manager ( $B = -0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $t = -0.53$ ,  $p = .594$ , 95% CI [-0.32, 0.18]). At lower organisational ranking ( $+1 SD$ ) ( $B = -0.24$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $t = -1.79$ ,  $p = .076$ , 95% CI [-0.49, 0.01]), the effect was slightly stronger but failed to reach conventional levels of significance.

However when using robust standard errors to account for potential heteroskedasticity, results confirmed poor prior organisational performance increased the likelihood of appointing an ethnic minority manager particularly in lower-ranked organisations. Specifically in lower-ranked ( $+1 SD$ ) organisations, prior managerial performance had a strong negative effect, reaching statistical significance ( $B = -0.34$ , Robust  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $t = -3.39$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-0.53, -0.14]). In contrast, in higher ranked organisations ( $-1 SD$ ), the relationship remained non-significant ( $B = -0.06$ , Robust  $SE = 0.12$ ,  $t = -0.46$ ,  $p = .648$ , 95% CI [-0.29, 0.18]). The findings are consistent with Hypothesis 2, suggesting that ethnic minority leadership appointments are more prevalent in lower-ranked organisations following poor predecessor performance. While not all effects reached conventional significance, the interaction between organisational ranking and prior organisational performance indicates that lower-ranked organisations are more likely to appoint ethnic minority managers following poor predecessor performance.

**Table 5.5**  
*Results for Organisational Ranking x Predecessor Performance Interactions (PMWR)*  
*on Ethnic Minority Leadership Appointments*

|                                | (1)                 | (2)                 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                                | OLS                 | IV                  |
| Prior Manager Win Rate         | .06<br>(.02)        | .21<br>(.21)        |
| Organisational Ranking<br>(OR) | .004<br>(.004)      | .007<br>(.004)      |
| PMWR x OR Interaction          | -.005<br>(.003)     | -.007*<br>(.003)    |
| Age When Hired                 | .007<br>(.008)      | .007<br>(.008)      |
| Total Experience               | -.00006<br>(.00003) | -.00007<br>(.00003) |
| Prior Leader Ethnicity         | .26<br>(.21)        | .25<br>(.21)        |
| $R^2$                          | .118                | .112                |
| $\chi^2$                       | 2.61                | 2.744               |

*Note.* The instrument for the IV analysis was prior performance difference.

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## 5.5 Discussion

To date, research on the glass cliff phenomenon continues to be predominantly focused on gender dynamics associated with precarious leadership, that is, women's rather than men's appointment to high-risk leadership roles. As a result, it remains unclear whether similar patterns extend to other atypical leaders, such as ethnic minority individuals. To address this gap in the existing literature, we examined the

glass cliff phenomenon for ethnic minority leaders using a sample of 109 English football organisations across a twenty-year period from 2003 to 2023. The findings provided evidence of the glass cliff for ethnic minority managers in the football context. In line with Hypothesis 1b, we found that ethnic minority leaders were more likely than their White counterparts to be appointed to poor-performing organisations when predecessor performance was used as an indicator of organisational precarity. Similarly, we found support for Hypothesis 2, which predicted an increased likelihood of an ethnic minority leader being appointed to precarious leadership roles is more pronounced in lower-ranking organisations compared to higher-ranking ones. The validity of these findings is significantly enhanced as we have rigorously addressed and accounted for potential endogeneity concerns. Our results suggest that the nature of performance measures (fixed, organisation- vs. predecessor-level) and contextual factors in the form of organisational characteristics (e.g., organisational ranking) influence glass cliff outcomes.

Our findings support claims suggesting that the glass cliff reflects decision-making processes informed by social perception and judgement (Haslam et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2016). Contrasting H1a, we found no evidence of the glass cliff when applying fixed, organisation-level performance measures typically used in the extant literature. This finding indicates that leadership appointments to precarious roles are seemingly evenly distributed across groups particularly in the management context (Bechtoldt et al., 2019). An often-used context for glass cliff research is the political arena, in which a level of failure tolerance is permissible when considering election success is based on the aggregation of individual events at the party level (Kulich et al., 2014). Leadership in the management context cannot accept such a tolerance, hence

making a fixed, organisation-level performance metric(s) less susceptible to bias and the underlying losses associated with suboptimal organisational decision-making.

Although no glass cliff effects were found using fixed, organisation-level performance measures in the present study, the theoretical and more crucially practical relevance of a single static measure serving as a proxy for organisational performance should be critically analyzed in the future.

Predecessor-level conceptualisations of organisational performance have been underutilised in glass cliff research, despite their potential to capture the perceptual and behavioral dynamics influencing leadership appointments (Morgenroth et al., 2020). A blended approach to performance, one that considers both long-term organisational trends, immediate predecessor outcomes, and behavioral elements of leadership, offers a more holistic view of leadership role quality (Gentry et al., 2021). Likewise, understanding the glass cliff as a phenomenon shaped by predecessor performance, rather than purely fixed, organisation-level metrics, remains an underexplored but critical avenue of research. While this study does not directly assess the underlying psychological mechanisms associated with leader categorization, it draws on this framework to inform the present hypotheses and interpret patterns of leadership selection. In particular, transference-based reactions to predecessor failure may explain the preference for categorically distinct (i.e., ethnic minority) leaders in precarious leadership roles (Preston & Carton, 2024). In this context, we operationalised role precariousness using predecessor-level performance measures and identified glass cliff effects for ethnic minority leaders. This result proves significant as it deviates from prior null results that used fixed, market-based organisation-level measurement of the glass cliff (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Li et al., 2024), and highlights the importance of using

theoretically grounded and context-sensitive performance metrics to detect the phenomenon.

The present study not only aimed to examine whether ethnic minority leaders might be subject to glass cliff appointments but also to explore the conditions under which this effect may be more or less pronounced. Specifically, we examined a novel moderator, organisational ranking, which captures organisational output with links to visibility, familiarity, and size (Szymanski, 2000). Prior evidence suggests that glass cliff appointments are more prevalent in low-visibility settings (Ihmels et al., 2023). Takizawa et al. (2024) also found some support for this trend, specifically in relation to ethnic minority leaders. Consistent with these findings, the results showed a pattern whereby lower-ranked and consequently less visible organisations appear more inclined to appoint ethnic minority leaders during periods of organisational precarity. These results align with prior findings relating to signal strength and organisational familiarity (Kharouf et al, 2020). For example, individuals with low organisational familiarity rely more on signal strength (e.g., appointment of an atypical leader) to evaluate organisational actions (e.g., efforts to counteract poor performance), whereas those with high familiarity draw on prior experience to contextualise the same signals, reducing the signal's impact (Dawar & Lei, 2009; Sirianni et al., 2013). This trend may also reflect differences in risk tolerance associated with organisational ranking. Drawing on the construct of loss aversion (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), highly ranked organisations may avoid making atypical leadership appointments due to the perceived reputational risks associated with deviating from established norms. In contrast, lower-ranked organisations may see more to gain in appointing an ethnic minority leader as a strategic deviation and potential high-reward signal to stakeholders.

In addition to the selection of appropriate measures to assess organisational performance within the glass cliff, methods used in the literature have been appropriately called into question (Bechtoldt et al., 2019). Endogeneity derived from omitted variables has arisen as a concern for prior archival studies of the glass cliff and has been largely unaddressed (Reinwald et al., 2022). In order to address those concerns, we employed matching procedures and instrumental variable analysis in the models. Unlike prior studies, we were able to identify a strong instrument to include in the IV approach which strengthens the robustness of the findings (Bechtoldt et al., 2019). This study is the first to apply this methodology for a study of ethnic minority leadership and the glass cliff. The findings suggest that the glass cliff effect for ethnic minority leaders may persist when accounting for endogeneity.

### ***5.5.1 Practical Implications***

The findings suggest that organisations may undervalue the socio-cognitive influence of perceived predecessor performance when making leadership appointments. While fixed, organisation-level performance remains a crucial trigger of leadership succession events, it may not fully capture the relational and perceptual dynamics that instigate the glass cliff phenomenon. In contrast, predecessor-level performance, and the expectations or associations carried over from outgoing leaders, may directly shape appointment preferences, particularly for ethnic minority leaders in precarious leadership roles. In practice, this difference demonstrates the need for organisations to recognise the lasting influence of leadership legacy effects (Preston & Carton, 2024). To mitigate these effects, succession planning should not only consider fixed, organisation-level performance benchmarks but also acknowledge and account for the

developed narratives around predecessor performance which may bias appointment processes. A failure to do so risks perpetuating reactive, signal-based strategies driven by innate desire to signal change rather than selecting leaders based on capability and fit.

Furthermore, the findings point to a potential relationship between organisational performance and ranking according to which resource availability and external scrutiny may influence the glass cliff. In highly ranked organisations, the benefits of leadership appointment signals are diminished due to their existing high visibility and strong external scrutiny. Because these organisations already attract significant attention, the marginal value of signalling change through an ethnic minority leadership appointment is relatively low. In contrast, lower ranked organisations operate in a lower visibility context, where leadership appointments have the potential to generate disproportionate attention. The stark contrast between a typical and an atypical leadership appointment in these settings amplifies signalling effects, drawing external interest and potentially reshaping perceptions of the organisation. For example, in football, central governing bodies (e.g., The English Football Association) can provide targeted recruiting resources (e.g., transparent candidate lists, diversity training, and hiring best practices) to help lower-ranked organisations prioritise leadership candidates based on skills and qualifications rather than the visibility or signalling impact of their appointment. Similarly, in broader management contexts, corporate governance initiatives or industry regulators can implement targeted interventions that account for organisational ranking and deliver resources where they are most required. While these interventions aim to improve decision-making in lower-ranked organisations, it is equally critical to ensure that ethnic minority leaders are not confined to precarious

leadership appointments. Broader structural reforms are needed to support ethnic minority leaders' advancement into stable, highly ranked leadership roles under standard, not just crisis, organisational conditions.

### ***5.5.2 Limitations And Recommendations for Future Research***

Although the present study design, using matched data and various performance measures, has a number of strengths, we also acknowledge the following study limitations. First, the sample reflects the broader reality of leadership appointments in professional football, where ethnic minority managers are significantly underrepresented. While this limited representation constrains statistical power, it also enhances the ecological validity of the findings by mirroring real-world disparities in managerial appointments. Despite this constraint, the present study provides a crucial foundation for future experimental research with larger and more balanced samples to further investigate these dynamics. Additional analytical concerns around endogeneity in glass cliff archival data were similarly evident within the dataset although the chosen methods were designed to best account for endogeneity through both matching procedures and instrumental variable estimations (Bechtoldt et al., 2019). In applying such robustness measures, the findings hold up to prior methodological concerns which cast doubt on the existence of the glass cliff phenomenon.

The present findings suggest that lower ranked organisations, compared to higher ranked organisations, are more likely to appoint ethnic minority leaders during precarious periods. However, the data did not allow for direct observation of categorisation and transference measures, which could influence signalling hypotheses related to organisational ranking. While the findings do not establish a direct link to

signalling motivation, they are consistent with Ihmels et al. (2023), who found that the glass cliff was more prevalent in contexts of lower media visibility. Takizawa et al. (2024) examined similar dynamics, however their findings were less conclusive. Limited evidence suggests that firm size and visibility are positively correlated making the signalling association with organisation ranking plausible (Jonkman et al., 2020) and thus an area for further research. Establishing what specifically makes ethnic minority groups perceived to be suitable for precarious leadership roles (e.g., signalling motives or trait-based associations) would complement the findings presented in this paper. Recent evidence suggests that racial dissimilarity is preferred during leadership transitions under poor organisational performance (Preston & Carton, 2024). It follows that the selection of ethnic minority leaders for precarious leadership roles has less to do with traits associated with the group but rather is a response to the prior poor performance of a non-ethnic minority predecessor.

Lastly, we acknowledge that the use of skin tone is an imperfect proxy for ethnic minority status, as ethnicity encompasses multiple factors such as cultural background and self-identification (Zhang et al, 2025). However, in the absence of self-reported data, visual markers, particularly skin tone, are commonly used in research on ethnic categorisation (Rosette et al., 2016). While name-based classification has been used in other contexts (e.g., Robinson et al., 2024), it may be less reliable in international football, where one's name does not always reflect ethnic identity. The skin tone data used for this research undergoes continuous external scrutiny and iterative updates by a collective group of over 1,500 researchers dedicated to ensuring its accuracy (Sports Interactive, 2024), making it robust for classification purposes.

## 5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, we studied the differential leadership opportunities presented to ethnic minority leaders through an expansive and dynamic view of organisational performance often missing in glass cliff literature. While the conventional understanding of the glass cliff phenomenon faces scrutiny, due to its highly context-specific nature, the research findings underscore the persistence of elevated risks for precarious leadership appointments among ethnic minority leaders. In doing so, we have addressed methodological concerns linked to causal inference through the application of matching procedures and instrumental variable analysis. The findings suggest that, despite the overwhelming obstacles confronted in the leadership development process, a deferred penalty of precarity may ultimately affect the limited ethnic minority leaders that earn leadership appointments. Additionally, the study provides insights into the detrimental effects of treating organisations of all ranks as one homologous entity. An organisation's comparative ranking requires tailored interventions to address leadership role inequality framed by the constraints of available resources and organisational capacity. By shedding light on this unique challenge faced by ethnic minority leaders, the present research contributes valuable insights that can inform future efforts aimed at reducing inequalities in leadership access and outcomes, ultimately fostering more equitable and sustainable leadership structures across organisations.

## **Chapter 6: Organisational Ranking Experimental Vignettes**

This chapter presents two studies (Studies 2 and 3) that build on the archival data study presented in Chapter 5 and that use an experimental design to allow for a causal examination of glass cliff effect for ethnic minority leaders and the moderating role of organisational ranking. Specifically, the present research aimed to test whether ethnic minority leadership candidates were more likely to face a glass cliff (that is being selected for a leadership position in poorly (compared to strongly) performing organisations), a pattern not observed for White counterparts. Two experimental vignette studies were conducted to investigate this hypothesis and to examine whether this effect was moderated by organisational ranking

In addition to reproducing the glass cliff effect in a controlled, experimental setting, these studies also sought to explore the underlying motivation for such appointments through the lens of signalling theory. According to signalling theory (Spence, 1973), organisations use observable and costly signals to reduce information asymmetries with external stakeholders. The appointment of an ethnic minority leader may function as such a signal as these appointments are both highly observable (e.g., generate higher publicity; Lovelace et al., 2022) and demonstrate high cost (e.g., both in perceived reputation cost for norm deviation and time cost in expanding leadership fit criteria beyond societal norms; Jeong et al., 2024). As outlined in Chapter 3, organisational ranking, as reflected in firm size, visibility, and familiarity, may influence the degree to which signalling is deemed necessary or effective (Kharouf et al., 2020; Saridakis et al., 2021). The two studies presented in this chapter were

designed to test whether ethnic minority leadership appointments are used to signal change, and whether organisational ranking moderates this signalling effect in the context of glass cliff appointments.

### 6.1 Overview of the Present Studies

The extant glass cliff literature, particularly within the management context, has predominately examined female leaders (Ryan et al., 2016). The research on the ethnic minority glass cliff has employed various methodological designs (i.e., within- and between-participant) and outcome variable measures (e.g., leadership suitability for precarious leadership roles, selection to precarious leadership roles; Morgenroth et al., 2020). The within-subjects design faces challenges in exposing participants to both typical and atypical candidates, which can lead to participants inferring the study's hypothesis (Charness et al., 2012). In contrast, the glass cliff between-subjects designs expose each participant to only one candidate, minimising the risk of demand characteristics (Nichols & Maner, 2008). Following from the archival study design presented in Chapter 5, methodological choice for the studies presented in this chapter was guided by the findings of a meta-analysis by Morgenroth et al. (2020). This analysis revealed that the glass cliff effect was stronger in between-participants studies. This provides a strong empirical justification for the use of a between-subjects design in Studies 2 and 3 to test the main glass cliff effect, which states:

**Hypothesis 1:** Ethnic minority leadership candidates will be more likely to face a glass cliff, that is being selected for a leadership position in poorly (compared to strongly) performing organisations, a pattern not observed for White counterparts.

A growing body of research suggests that an organisation's characteristics can influence leadership appointments to precarious roles. For example, organisation size (Saridakis et al., 2021) and visibility (Takizawa et al., 2024) have both been found to increase the likelihood of atypical leadership appointments to precarious leadership roles. Additionally, organisational familiarity more broadly impacts organisational decision-making (Kharouf et al., 2020), suggesting that these factors function as a signal to external stakeholders. In Chapter 5, this dynamic was explored utilising an organisational ranking indicator, which has associations with organisational size, visibility, and familiarity (Aguiar-Noury & Garcia-del-Barrio, 2022). In Study 1, the results indicated that lowly ranked clubs, compared to highly ranked ones, were more likely to appoint ethnic minority leaders to precarious leadership roles. This finding mirrors prior work by Takizawa and colleagues (2024), who found a similar appointment preference for ethnic minority leaders for organisations facing a low attention crisis. Similarly, these results align with Kharouf and colleagues' (2020) results suggesting that low familiarity organisations gain more benefit in stakeholder repair from signalling activities following a crisis. To establish a causal link, the present study seeks to validate the organisational ranking indicator by experimentally testing its association with perceptions of organisational size, visibility, and familiarity. This will ensure that the manipulation accurately captures the theoretical construct of interest. Furthermore, the present study aims to explore the causal relationship between organisational ranking and the glass cliff in an experimental setting. The goal of this study is, therefore, to provide a causal examination of the moderating role of organisational ranking on the glass cliff, leading to a direct test of the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** The relationship between leadership candidate ethnicity and selection for glass cliff leadership roles is moderated by organisational ranking, such that ethnic minority leadership candidates are more likely to be selected for glass cliff leadership roles in lower-ranked organisations compared to higher-ranked organisations.

Existing research suggests that ethnic minority leaders may be appointed to precarious leadership positions to signal turnaround intentions to stakeholders during times of organisational crisis (Kulich et al., 2018). However, the application of this signalling motive to ethnic minority leaders has produced nuanced and at times contradictory results. For example, Takizawa et al. (2024) found that ethnic minority leaders were preferred for low-attention crises but not for high-attention or stable contexts. This finding may suggest that a lack of media scrutiny may provide a protective context that encourages ethnic minority leadership appointments as they will largely go unnoticed and therefore unscrutinised. An alternative but complementary perspective, however, is that precarious leadership contexts may also seek to use ethnic minority appointments to increase impact of the signalling effect in the desire for change (Kharouf et al., 2020). This variation suggests that the signalling patterns for ethnic minority leaders may be contingent on the organisational dynamics at play, such as organisational ranking. As ethnicity is a highly salient and observable social category (Kenny & Briner, 2013), leader candidate ethnicity aligns with the observability and costliness criteria required for effective signalling. Accordingly, the following signalling hypothesis was formulated:

**Hypotheses 3:** The relationship between poorly performing organisations and leadership candidate ethnicity will be mediated by

the perception of the organisation's desire to visibly signal change in terms of signalling an intent to alter leadership styles.

Building on the theoretical framework for organisational ranking as a moderator of the glass cliff in conjunction with Hypothesis 2, a moderated mediation hypothesis is proposed (PROCESS Model 15; Hayes, 2017). Therefore, the present study also expect the signalling effect (Hypothesis 3) to be moderated by organisational ranking such that lowly ranked organisations will get more benefit from signalling and thus more likely to appoint ethnic minority leaders in precarious contexts, such that:

**Hypothesis 4:** The mediation effect as per Hypothesis 3 will be moderated by organisational ranking, such that lowly-ranked, compared to highly-ranked, organisations are more likely to select ethnic minority leadership candidates for the poorly (vs strongly) performing organisation as a signal of change to stakeholders.

### 6.2 Study 2

Study 2 aimed to experimentally test Hypothesis 1, which proposed that leader candidate ethnicity influences leadership appointment decisions in strongly- versus poorly-performing organisations, thereby providing further evidence of the glass cliff pattern observed in the archival data (Chapter 5). Specifically, this study examined whether ethnic minority candidates are more frequently selected for precarious leadership roles, and whether participants interpret such appointments as signals of change. Exploratory analyses also examined the signalling mediation hypothesis (Hypothesis 3) that was later pre-registered and directly explored in Study 3.

### **6.2.1 Methods**

**Participants.** A total of 160 final-year undergraduate students from a business school at an Irish university participated in this study (54% men, 42% women, 4% did not specify), with ages ranging from 20 to 50 years ( $M = 22.2$ ,  $SD = 3.19$ ). Most participants identified as Irish nationals (79%), with self-reported ethnicities of White (80%), Black (1%), Asian (7%), and Other (12%). Most participants had at least some level of work experience (94%) with 74% identifying as full-time students and 20% having some form of active employment. Eighteen participants were excluded from the sample due to random responding and failure on the organisation manipulation checks resulting in a total sample of 142 participants. A sensitivity analysis for the sample size indicated 142 participants could detect a medium effect size ( $OR = 1.61$ ; Faul et al., 2009).

**Study Procedure.** Prior to the start of a “Business Strategy” lecture, participants were provided with the study materials and a cover letter outlining the study and informed consent details. Those who opted to take part completed the questionnaire in approximately 10 minutes. Participation was voluntary and responses were anonymous. Study and consent procedures were approved in accordance with the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee (Research Ethics Committee Reference: DCUREC/2023/073).

The experimental study employed a between-subjects design in which participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions, in which leadership candidate ethnicity (White or ethnic minority) for an open leadership role as a club manager was manipulated. The vignette presented participants with background information and performance outcomes for two fictitious football clubs, one described

as strongly performing and the other as poorly performing. Participants were then informed that both clubs were actively seeking new club managers and that candidates for these positions would need to be reviewed. Participants would ultimately assess one candidate on appointment fit for these two positions.

**Organisational Performance Manipulation.** Organisational performance was manipulated via a fictitious news article textual describing recent organisational performance along with a visual graph outlining performance trends over time. The description of organisational performance (i.e., Wakefield AFC = strongly performing, Kingston FC = poorly performing) read as follows:

The past few seasons have seen a disastrous decline (outstanding growth) in Kingston FC's (Wakefield AFC's) national status. Over this time, it has experienced a steady fall (rise) in its performance, realising consistent drops down (progression up) the league table. Profits, player recruitment, and national popularity have diminished. Football experts around the country hold the now retiring manager, Andrew Clark (William Pritchard), responsible for these poor losses (excellent gains).

Participants were then informed through a separate fictitious news article that both clubs were seeking new leaders to manage the clubs. Before moving forward to view one of the two candidates, participants were asked to confirm the organisational performance of each club as stated in the aforementioned material.

**Leadership Candidate Ethnicity Manipulation.** Leadership candidate ethnicity was manipulated through pre-tested names (either Mike Veriman or Anthony

Olukayode) and headshots, such that half of the participants reviewed the profile of a White candidate and half of the participants reviewed the profile of an ethnic minority candidate (Ma et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2009). The vignette specified multiple shortlisted candidates to reduce speculation about which characteristics may be the focus of the study (Preston & Carton, 2024). Participants were then randomly assigned to a candidate profile that included the candidate's name, age, current role, past role, role qualifications, and playing experience. Following a review of the candidate's background, participants were asked to complete the same questionnaire and to indicate which of two clubs the candidate would be most suitable for—with one club's performance reflective of strong performance and the other club's performance reflective of poor performance. Participants were then asked to assess the candidate on their ability to signal change to stakeholders (adopted from Kulich et al., 2018) and their ability to impact future results. Lastly, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

### **6.2.2 Measures**

Unless otherwise indicated, all measures were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree).

**Signalling Change.** Three items from Kulich et al. (2018) and assessed signalling change capabilities were adapted to the football context: “The choice of this candidate symbolises a visible change for players and supporters”, “The fact of appointing this candidate will show that the club wants to change the type of management”, and “This candidate would be an inspiring role model to players, particularly those who are also ethnic minorities”. Participants responded on a 7-point

Likert scale ( $M = 5.38$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ). The internal consistency of the three-item scale was acceptable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .58$ ).

**Manipulation Check.** Participants' perceptions of organisational performance were assessed to verify the experimental manipulation. After reading the club descriptions, participants rated the recent performance of each club. Participants indicated for both clubs whether the organisation's recent performance was "Good" or "Bad" recently.

**Demographics.** Participants provided their gender, age, nationality, primary spoken language, political orientation, education, employment status, and work experience.

**Industry Knowledge.** To measure football-specific knowledge, participants indicated their level of engagement with football-related media and familiarity with past or present football managers in the UK. The two items were "How often do you watch football matches or consume football-related information" and "How would you describe your knowledge of past or present football managers in the UK". Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale (football consumption, 1 = Very Little to 7 = Very Frequent;  $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 2.52$ , manager familiarity, 1 = No Knowledge to 7 = Advanced Knowledge;  $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 2.28$ ). Demographic and industry knowledge scores were used as covariates in exploratory analyses.

### **6.2.3 Results**

**Manipulation Check.** A manipulation check confirmed that participants perceived the organisational performance manipulation as intended. Overall, 92.5% answered the manipulation check correctly. Pass rates were high and comparable across

organisations (Wakefield AFC, strongly performing organisation, 93.7%; Kingston FC, poorly performing organisation, 91.2% ;  $\chi^2(1, N = 318) = 0.41, p = .524$ ).

**Hypothesis Testing: Organisation Selection.** To assess whether leadership candidate ethnicity influenced organisation selection (i.e., appointment to strongly-versus poorly-performing organisation), a chi-square test of independence was conducted. The results revealed no significant association ( $\chi^2(1, N = 142, \text{Yates}) = 1.00, p = .300$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was not supported, as ethnic minority and White leaders were selected for the low-performing organisation at similar rates.

Despite the lack of a significant overall effect, follow-up analyses were conducted to explore patterns of selection within each leadership candidate ethnicity condition. In the ethnic minority candidate condition, a chi-square goodness-of-fit test revealed a significant deviation from an expected uniform selection (i.e., a 50/50 split), ( $\chi^2(1, n = 72) = 9.00, p = .002$ ). The observed effect size was moderate (Cramer's  $V = .35$ ). The poorly performing organisation was selected by 68% of participants, while 32% of participants selected the strongly performing organisation as most suitable for the ethnic minority leadership candidate. In contrast, in the White candidate condition, a similar chi-square goodness-of-fit test showed no significant difference in organisation selection from the expected uniform distribution, ( $\chi^2(1, n = 70) = 2.00, p = .200$ ). The observed effect size was small (Cramer's  $V = .17$ ). This indicates a relatively even distribution of organisation selection in the White leadership candidate condition (59% selecting the poorly performing organisation and 41% selecting the strongly performing organisation). Taken together, these findings offer partial support for the glass cliff hypothesis. While the overall effect of leadership candidate ethnicity on organisation selection was not statistically significant, the significant skew in selection patterns

observed within the ethnic minority candidate condition suggests that ethnicity may influence organisation selection decision-making under precarious organisational conditions.

**Test of the Mediation of Signalling Change.** To explore how leader candidate ethnicity might shape signalling interpretations of leadership appointments, a set of exploratory analyses were conducted on a three-item signalling change scale (Kulich et al., 2018). A mediation analysis (PROCESS Model 4, with 5,000 biased bootstrap samples; Hayes, 2017) was conducted to explore preliminary evidence of Hypothesis 3, which stated that the relationship between poorly performing organisations and leadership candidate ethnicity will be mediated by the organisation's desire to visibly signal change in terms of signalling an intent to alter leadership styles. The dependent measure was organisation selection (0 = strongly performing, 1 = poorly performing organisation). The leadership candidate ethnicity condition (0 = White, 1 = ethnic minority candidate) was entered as the independent variable and the 'signalling change' variable was entered as mediator. The mediation model indicated that ethnic minority leadership candidates were perceived as signalling change more strongly than White candidates (path a:  $b = 0.48$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ , Hedges'  $g = 0.51$ ,  $p = .003$ , 95% CI [0.17, 0.79]). The outcome model showed that signalling perceptions were positively associated with the likelihood of selection to a precarious leadership role (path b:  $b = 0.76$ ,  $SE = 0.23$ ,  $OR = 2.13$ ,  $p = .001$ ), while leadership candidate ethnicity was not a significant direct predictor (path c:  $b = 0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.39$ ,  $p = .701$ ). The indirect effect was statistically significant (95% CI [0.02, 0.18],  $p = .003$ ), indicating that leadership candidate ethnicity affected organisation selection through perceived signalling. The direct and total effects were not significant ( $ps > .17$ ). These findings provide initial

support for Hypothesis 3 by demonstrating that signalling perceptions mediate the relationship between leadership candidate ethnicity and precarious leadership appointment decisions, even in the absence of a significant total effect.

### **6.2.4 Discussion**

Study 2 examined whether leadership candidate ethnicity influenced organisation selection to precarious versus non-precarious leadership roles, as predicted by the glass cliff. The results from this first study did not support Hypothesis 1, as leadership candidate ethnicity did not significantly affect the likelihood of being selected to a poorly-performing organisation. Although ethnic minority candidates were selected for the precarious role at a slightly higher rate (68%) than White candidates (59%), this difference was not statistically significant.

Hypothesis 3, however, indicated that selection patterns may not be entirely random. Specifically, while leadership candidate ethnicity alone was not a significant direct predictor of selection to precarious leadership roles, there was evidence of a significant indirect effect whereby ethnic minority candidates were perceived as stronger signals of change, and this signalling was associated with a greater likelihood of selection to the precarious leadership role, providing initial evidence for Hypothesis 3. This suggests that signalling processes may partially explain the contextual conditions under which ethnic minority leaders are selected for precarious leadership roles.

The results indicate a full mediation. While leadership candidate ethnicity was not a significant direct predictor of organisation selection, it had a significant indirect effect through perceived signalling. This suggests that participants did not necessarily have an explicit, direct preference for appointing an ethnic minority candidate to a

precarious role. Instead, their decisions were mediated by an underlying cognitive process through which the ethnicity of the candidate served as a powerful cue that activated a desire for a change. Once this signalling motive was triggered, participants were more likely to select the ethnic minority candidate for the precarious position. In essence, the preference for an ethnic minority leader is not a straightforward bias but is contingent on whether they are perceived as a means to an end, that is, as a signal of change in a time of crisis (Kulich et al., 2015; Robinson et al., 2024). This finding highlights the importance of the signalling mechanism, but it leaves an important question unanswered: under what specific conditions does this mediation process occur? The results from Chapter 5, which suggested that organisational ranking may moderate the glass cliff effect, provide a potential answer to this question. Therefore, Study 3 was designed to directly test whether organisational ranking influences the signalling process found in the present study.

### **6.3 Study 3**

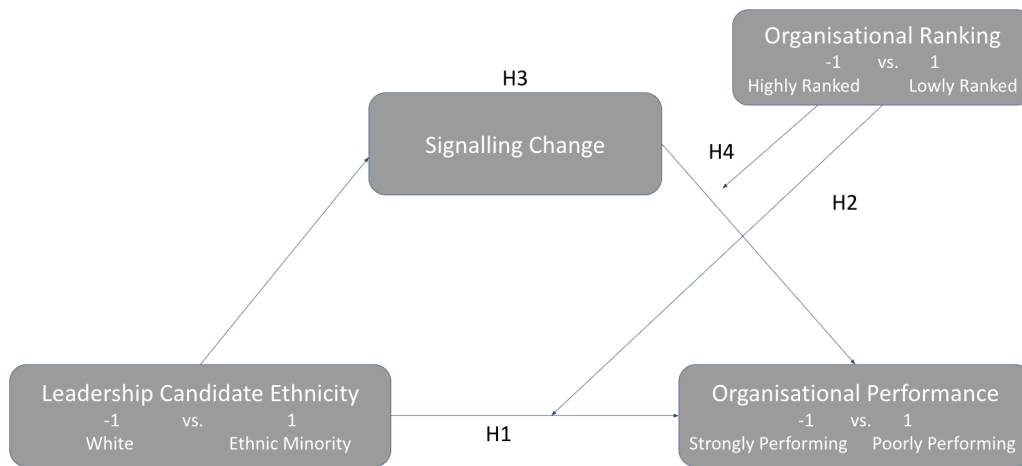
Building on the mediation finding from Study 2, which suggested that the signalling motive is a key psychological mechanism in precarious leadership appointments, Study 3 aimed to test a critical moderator of this process. Specifically, building on the results reported in Chapter 5, this study examined whether organisational ranking moderates both the glass cliff main effect and the signalling mediation effect explored in Study 2. It was reasoned that the effectiveness of an ethnic minority candidate as a signal of change would be contingent on the context provided by an organisation's ranking. Accordingly, Study 3 tested the moderated mediation hypothesis (Hypothesis 4). This hypothesis states that the mediation effect as per Hypothesis 3 will be moderated by organisational ranking, such that lowly-ranked,

compared to highly-ranked, organisations are more likely to select ethnic minority leadership candidates for the poorly (vs strongly) performing organisation as a signal of change to stakeholders

(a conceptual model, corresponding to PROCESS Model 15 (Hayes, 2017) is shown in Figure 6.1):

**Figure 6.1**

*Study 3 Proposed Model*



**6.3.1 Methods**

**Participants.** The sample included 250 UK-based professionals recruited by Prolific (58% men, 41% women, 1% Non-binary), aged 19 to 72 ( $M = 37.7$ ,  $SD = 10.4$ ). The participants all identified as UK nationals (79% White, 8% Black, 9% Asian, 4% Arab). Participants all had some work experience with 98% currently in full time employment and 2% in part-time employment with a mean employment tenure of 15.0 years ( $SD = 7.79$ ). Any observations with missing critical information that was essential to the dependent or independent variables were excluded from analysis. Participants

who failed to comply with the experimental instructions (e.g., those who do not complete the task, engage in random clicking, or fail at least one of the attention checks) were also excluded. Accordingly, 16 participants were excluded leaving a total sample of 234 participants due to failing the comprehension check in identifying their organisational ranking condition. A sensitivity analysis for the sample size indicated 234 participants could detect a small-to-medium effect size (OR = 1.44; Faul et al., 2009).

**Study Procedure.** On the platform Prolific, participants were provided with the study materials and a cover letter outlining the study and informed consent details. Those who opted to take part completed the questionnaire in approximately 12 minutes. Participation was voluntary and responses were anonymous. Study and consent procedures were approved in accordance with the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee (Research Ethics Committee Reference: DCUREC/2023/073) and pre-registered on AsPredicted (AsPredicted Reference: #197855).

This study employs a 2 (leadership candidate ethnicity: White vs ethnic minority) x 2 (organisational ranking: highly vs lowly ranked) between-subjects design. Participants were presented with a fictional vignette advertising two open leadership vacancies at UK-based football clubs.

**Organisational Ranking Manipulation.** Organisational ranking was manipulated via a fictitious news article textual describing the comparative ranking of the organisation along with a visual table outlining the league position of the clubs. In the highly ranked (lowly ranked) condition, participants were told the two hiring clubs were in the First Division (Fourth Division), the top division (bottom division) in English professional football, with one club described as being strongly-performing and

the second being a poorly-performing club. The description of organisational ranking read as follows:

The past few seasons for Kingston FC (Wakefield AFC) can only be characterised by a disastrous decline (outstanding growth). Over this time, it has experienced a steady fall (rise) in its performance, realising consistent drops down (progressions up) the First (Fourth) Division table. Profits, player recruitment, and fan support have diminished (risen). Football experts around the country hold the now retiring manager, Andrew Clark (William Pritchard), responsible for these poor losses (excellent gains).

Next, participants were asked to assess leadership candidates that were shortlisted for the two open positions. The candidate and organisational performance manipulation material from Study 2 were replicated in Study 3 as well as the appointment selection and signalling measures.

### **6.3.2 Measures**

Unless otherwise indicated, all measures were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree).

**Signalling Change.** Six items adapted from Kulich et al. (2018) assessed perceptions of the leadership candidate's signalling capabilities. In Study 2, participants assessed signalling change using a three-item scale that captured signalling to different organisational groups (i.e., players, staff, supporters). For the present study, these items were broken down into a six-item measure to assess each of the three groups individually. Items included, "The choice of this candidate symbolises a visible change

for players”, “The choice of this candidate symbolises a visible change for staff.”, and “The fact of appointing this candidate will demonstrate to the broader industry the club's intent to alter management styles.”,  $\alpha = .86$ ,  $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ).

### 6.3.3 Results

**Manipulation Check.** To ensure that the organisational ranking manipulation was successful, a three-item scale was used to assess organisational familiarity, visibility, and size in relation to organisational ranking (e.g., “Kingston FC is perceived as a large club”; for full results see Table 6.1). Responses used a 7-point Likert scale ( $M = 3.74$ ;  $SD = 1.25$ ) and were averaged across the three items to form the manipulation check index and the reliability of this index across conditions was high (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .84 - .91$ ). A 2 (organisational ranking: highly ranked vs. lowly ranked) x 2 (organisational performance: strongly performing vs. poorly performing) between-subjects ANOVA was conducted on the manipulation check index. As expected, there was a statistically significant main effect of organisational ranking,  $F(1,464) = 80.94$ ,  $p < .001$ . Participants in the highly ranked condition ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ) rated the clubs as having a larger organisation size, higher familiarity, and higher visibility than those in the lowly ranked condition ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ). Additionally, a statistically significant main effect of organisational performance was observed,  $F(1,464) = 53.21$ ,  $p < .001$ . This indicates that clubs described as strongly performing ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ) were also perceived as having a larger organisation size, higher familiarity, and higher visibility than clubs described as poorly performing ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ). The interaction between organisational ranking and organisational performance was not significant,  $F(1,464) = 0.95$ ,  $p = .331$ , suggesting the effects of the two manipulations were independent and additive.

**Table 6.1**

*Means (and Standard Deviations) for Organisational Ranking Items by Condition*

| Item                                   | Condition                     |                                |                                |                                 |
|--|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|  | Low Ranking & Low Performance | Low Ranking & High Performance | High Ranking & Low Performance | High Ranking & High Performance |
| Perceived as a large club              | 2.74 (1.18)                   | 3.36 (1.58)                    | 3.64 (1.35)                    | 4.58 (1.21)                     |
| Familiar to average fan                | 3.08 (1.42)                   | 3.76 (1.63)                    | 3.95 (1.34)                    | 4.88 (1.42)                     |
| Highly visible club to the average fan | 2.69 (1.28)                   | 3.62 (1.72)                    | 3.74 (1.34)                    | 4.78 (1.47)                     |

**Hypothesis Testing: Organisation Selection.** Hypothesis 1 predicted that ethnic minority leadership candidates will be more likely to face a glass cliff, that is being selected for a leadership position in poorly (compared to strongly) performing organisations, a pattern not observed for White counterparts. To test this prediction, a binary logistic regression was conducted on organisation selection (-1 = strongly performing organisation, 1 = poorly performing organisation) with the independent variable leadership candidate ethnicity (-1 = White candidate; 1 = ethnic minority candidate). This revealed no significant main effect of leadership candidate ethnicity on organisation selection ( $b = -0.0003$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $OR = 1.00$ ,  $p = .998$ , 95% CI [0.78, 1.28]). Thus, Hypothesis 1 could not be supported.

Following on from archival results from Chapter 5, Hypothesis 2 predicted that the relationship between leadership candidate ethnicity and organisational selection would be moderated by organisational ranking, such that ethnic minority candidates would be more likely to be selected for precarious roles in lower ranked organisations. A moderation regression analysis was conducted with organisation selection (-1 = strongly performing organisation, 1 = poorly performing organisation) as the dependent variable. Predictors included leadership candidate ethnicity (-1 = White, 1 = ethnic minority), organisational ranking (-1 = highly ranked, 1 = lowly ranked), and the leadership Candidate ethnicity  $\times$  Organisational ranking interaction. A significant main effect was found for organisational ranking suggesting that the candidates were more likely to be selected for poorly performing organisations when the organisation was lower ranked ( $b = -0.486$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $OR = -3.68$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.47, 0.80]). However, the main effect of leadership candidate ethnicity ( $b = 0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $OR = 1.05$ ,  $p = .710$ , 95% CI [0.81, 1.36]) and the predicted interaction term ( $b = -0.007$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $OR = 0.99$ ,  $p = .956$ , 95% CI [0.76, 1.29]) failed to reach statistical significance. Hypothesis 2, suggesting the relationship between leadership candidate ethnicity and selection for glass cliff leadership roles is moderated by organisational ranking, such that ethnic minority leadership candidates are more likely to be selected for glass cliff leadership roles in lower-ranked organisations compared to higher-ranked organisations, could not be supported.

To test Hypothesis 3 and 4, a moderated mediation model was specified (PROCESS Model 15; Hayes, 2017). This single model was used to test both a simple mediation (Hypothesis 3) and a moderated mediation (Hypothesis 4) because the latter is built directly upon the former. The model used leadership candidate ethnicity as the

independent variable, perceived success signal as the mediating variable, organisational ranking as the moderator, and organisation selection as the dependent variable.

Hypothesis 3 proposed a simple mediation, which tested whether the relationship between organisation selection and leadership candidate ethnicity was mediated by the perception of an organisation's desire to visibly signal change. Hypothesis 4 extended this by predicting that the mediation effect would be moderated by organisational ranking, such that the mediation would be stronger for lowly ranked, compared to highly ranked, organisations.

The analysis revealed that perceptions of the leadership candidate's ability to signal change significantly predicted appointments to poorly (vs strongly) performing organisations (*b1* path;  $b = 0.39, p < .001$ ), such that candidates perceived as more likely to signal success were more likely to be selected in precarious organisational contexts. However, there was no evidence that leadership candidate ethnicity influenced perceptions of the candidate to signal success (*a1* path;  $b = 0.06, p = .285$ ), nor that organisational ranking moderated this association (*a3* path;  $b = 0.06, p = .332$ ). Similarly, the interaction between the leadership candidate's ability to signal success and organisational ranking in predicting organisation selection was non-significant (*b3* path:  $b = 0.001, p = .983$ ), as was the direct effect of ethnicity on organisation selection (*c'* path:  $b = -0.004, p = .953$ ). The indirect effect of ethnicity on appointment through perceived signalling was small and not statistically significant (indirect effect = 0.03,  $SE = 0.02, p = .299$ ), and the moderated mediation hypothesis was not supported. These findings indicate that while success signals play an important role in leadership appointments, they do not appear to be shaped by leader candidate ethnicity nor do they

vary across organisational ranking conditions. As such, Hypotheses 3 and 4 could not be supported.

### **6.3.4 Discussion**

Study 3 aimed to replicate and extend the archival findings reported in Chapter 5, where ethnic minority leaders were found to be more likely to be appointed to organisations with precarious leadership roles, compared to organisations with strongly performing leadership roles. This effect was also found to be moderated by organisational ranking such that lower ranked organisations were more likely to appoint ethnic minority leaders to precarious leadership roles compared to highly ranked organisations.

In seeking to further investigate findings from the archival study in Chapter 5, this study directly tested signalling motivations for the glass cliff and proposed that lower ranked organisations would use glass cliff appointments as a way to signal change to external stakeholders through the appointment of ethnic minority leaders. Hypothesis 1, which stated that ethnic minority leaders were more likely appointed to glass cliff leadership roles, could not be supported in this context. The results identified that participants almost evenly appointed White and ethnic minority leaders to both poorly and strongly performing leadership roles (see General Discussion for further exploration of this effect).

For Hypothesis 2, which stated that organisational ranking would moderate the glass cliff effect for ethnic minority leaders, such that lower ranked organisations would be more likely to select an ethnic minority leader, results could not support this claim. While the main effect of organisational ranking on organisation selection was statistically significant in demonstrating an association between lower ranked

organisations and precarious leadership appointments, the interaction between organisational ranking and leadership candidate ethnicity failed to reach statistical significance. Thus, Hypothesis 2 could not be supported in this study. These findings suggest that the combined impact of organisational cues, such as an organisation's ranking and recent performance, may exert more influence on selection decisions than any social identity cue. This could be the case because the context of professional sports provides a uniquely clear and objective measure of organisational precarity. Unlike in many corporate settings, a football club's lower ranking is an unambiguous signal of long-term precarity, while poor recent performance indicates an immediate crisis (Audas et al., 1999). Consequently, the combination of these two signals creates an overriding and highly salient need to address the organisational precarity, which may diminish the influence of typically salient indicators for leadership transitions, such as a candidate's ethnicity.

Lastly, Hypothesis 3 and 4 directly explored the signalling motivation of the glass cliff, while also extending this motivation to include organisational ranking in a moderated mediation analysis. Although the perception of a leadership candidate's ability to signal change predicted precarious leadership selection, none of the other pathways in the model were statistically significant. While the perception of a leadership candidate's ability to signal change plays a meaningful role in precarious leadership selection, this relationship is not shaped by leader candidate ethnicity or organisational ranking. This finding is consistent with signalling theory (Spence, 1973) and aligns with the broader glass cliff literature (Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Kulich et al., 2015), where participants view signals of change as especially important in poorly

performing organisations. However, this study also provides a crucial point of divergence from existing research.

The results suggest that the perception of a leader's ability to signal change may be a more direct driver of leadership appointments, independent of social identity cues. This finding is supported by recent work from Takizawa and colleagues (2024), who found that the link between a leadership candidate's ethnicity and their perceived ability to signal change is highly context-dependent. This result suggests that in a context with an unambiguous performance metric, such as professional sports, the need to signal change becomes an overriding concern that may diminish the salience of a leadership candidate's ethnicity as a cue for change. This finding contributes a valuable new dimension to the literature, suggesting that the link between a candidate's social identity and their perceived ability to signal change is highly context-dependent.

### **6.4 General Discussion**

This chapter aimed to empirically test the significant glass cliff findings from Chapter 5 within the professional football management context. Specifically, two studies were conducted to (a) examine whether ethnic minority leadership candidates are more likely than their White counterparts to be appointed to precarious leadership roles and (b) whether this effect is shaped by an organisation's comparative ranking (highly vs. lowly ranked organisations). Across the two experimental vignette studies, the results for the glass cliff hypothesis and an organisational ranking moderation could not be supported. Across both studies, leadership candidate ethnicity did not significantly predict organisation selection.

The null findings are notable in light of the broader glass cliff literature and may reflect the influence of several contextual and methodological factors. While the glass

cliff has been replicated in various industries and domains, the sporting domain presents unique challenges (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Performance in sport is highly quantifiable and objectively evaluated (Audas et al., 1999; d'Addona & Kind, 2011), which may reduce the ambiguity in leadership appointments that typically enable bias to emerge. As seen in Chapter 5, fixed, organisation-level performance measures may diminish the subjectivity thought to underpin the glass cliff. In the two studies presented in this chapter, the use of organisation-level performance measures may have attenuated potential bias effects (Haslam et al., 2010). Further experimental research directly positioning predecessor performance as the determinant factor in the leadership appointments should be explored. Not only are domain-specific factors at play here, different methodological considerations around experimental realism and statistical power may have also impacted the findings overall and the divergence from Chapter 5 results (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014).

The use of experimental vignettes relies on the establishment of study realism to capture reliable effects (Hughes & Huby, 2002). In Study 3, the level of complexity in the moderated mediation design makes capturing realism and a sufficient sample size a difficult task (Aguinis et al., 2016). As discussed in Chapter 4, the prevalence of Type II error (i.e., falsely concluding there is no significant effect) is higher in moderation regression analysis (Stone-Romero et al., 1994). While no significant interaction effect was observed in Study 3, post hoc power analysis revealed that the model was extremely underpowered to detect the observed effect size (Cohen's  $f^2 = 0.00001$ ,  $1 - \beta = .05$ ). This suggests that the null finding should be interpreted with caution, as the study lacked the statistical sensitivity to reliably detect small moderation effects. Although group sizes were relatively balanced, the negligible variance explained by the

interaction term limited the model's ability to detect meaningful patterns (Stone-Romero et al., 1994). These results highlight the challenge of testing subtle interaction effects in vignette-based designs and underscore the importance of adequately powered future research, possibly using larger samples or more immersive decision-making contexts (Aguinis et al., 2016).

Despite the lack of support for the proposed hypotheses, both studies yielded findings with implications for future research. Although the overall effect between leadership candidate ethnicity and precarious leadership appointments was not found, Study 2 did identify that ethnic minority candidates were more likely to be selected for poorly performing (compared to strongly performing) organisations. The findings from both studies, particularly in Study 3, highlight the profound influence of organisational ranking on leadership appointments. The significant main effect of organisational ranking in predicting precarious leadership appointments, regardless of leader candidate ethnicity, suggests that comparative organisational ranking, an indication of long-term precarity, may shape leadership role perceptions. This aligns with Audas et al. (1999) and supports the notion that poor performance takes precedence in objective contexts such as professional sports. It further reinforces the link between a crisis and the need for change, a main effect commonly found in the glass cliff literature where the need to signal transformation is strongest in a precarious context (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

Signalling change through leadership appointments mediated the relationship between leadership candidate ethnicity and organisation selection in Study 2 and significantly predicted a preference for precarious leadership in Study 3. This was a consistent finding across the two studies. As demonstrated in the findings, this signalling mechanism appears to be highly-context dependent (Robinson et al., 2024),

much like the glass cliff phenomenon itself (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Taken together, when organisations are facing precarity and have a lower comparative organisational ranking, signalling change to stakeholders appears to take on greater importance within the leadership appointment process (Kulich et al., 2015).

To conclude, this chapter outlines two studies that served as an experimental reproduction of the effects presented in the archival data from Chapter 5. The primary goal of this methodological shift was to establish a causal link between the variables, a relationship that could only be inferred from the archival data. As Wason and colleagues (2002) suggest, experimental vignette methods complement archival research by offering tightly controlled yet contextually grounded insights into real-world decision making. While the results did not support the proposed hypotheses, the two studies nonetheless contribute to the ongoing examination of the glass cliff by underscoring the phenomenon's context-specificity. Specifically, organisational ranking, signalling dynamics emerged as potential influences on leadership selection outcomes, particularly in precarious organisational contexts. Building on this emphasis to identify contextual factors that impact the glass cliff, the next chapter will integrate a related but unexplored literature stream, interim leadership, to the exploration of how ethnic minority leadership candidates may be differentially evaluated and appointed to precarious leadership roles.

**Chapter 7: Interim Leadership and the Glass Cliff: How Role Precarity Shapes the Selection of Ethnic Minority Leaders**

**Abstract**

Interim leaders emerge to fulfill a key organisational strategic need in addressing unplanned, abrupt, or disruptive leadership successions. However, a notable lack of attention has been paid to the understanding of the types of leaders being appointed to occupy these roles. To bridge this gap, this research integrates social psychological and management literature through the glass cliff phenomenon (Ryan & Haslam, 2005) to explore interim leadership as a specific form of precarious leadership which leads to a preference for ethnic minority leaders, a phenomenon called the glass cliff. Through a set of two experimental vignette studies ( $N = 537$ ), we found that while a general preference for ethnic minority leaders in interim roles was not supported, the preference is critically conditional on perceived precarity. Specifically, a significant preference for ethnic minority candidates emerged only when the interim role was perceived or experimentally framed as high in precarity (Studies 4 and 5). Altogether, findings indicate that interim leadership role framing is an important consideration in interim CEO succession events while providing the first evidence of a potential preference for ethnic minority leaders in interim leadership roles where role precarity is high. Implications and future research directions are discussed.

*This chapter is based on: Dempsey, S., Bosak J., & Kulich, C. (in preparation). Interim leadership and the glass cliff: How role precarity shapes the selection of ethnic minority leaders.*

## 7.1 Introduction

Leadership transitions are organisational events characterised by pressure and have a substantial impact on future organisational outcomes (Bern & Klarner, 2017; Desai et al., 2017; Giambatista et al., 2005; Hambrick & Lee, 2025). Across industries, leadership transitions are becoming increasingly frequent (Challenger Grey & Christmas Inc., 2025) due to increased performance scrutiny (Farah et al., 2020), amplifying the stakes of each leadership appointment decision. This increased turnover has led to a related increase in the appointment of interim leaders to manage day-to-day operations until a permanent leader can be hired due to failures in succession planning (Ballinger & Marcel, 2009; Fisher et al., 2024; Hambrick & Lee, 2025). At the same time, research on the glass cliff has shown that ethnic minority leaders are more likely to be appointed to leadership roles in precarious organisational settings in which risk of failure is elevated due to poor prior performance (Gündemir et al., 2019; Morgenroth et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2024). Both interim leadership and the glass cliff phenomenon demonstrate how organisational failure (e.g., succession planning or performance) can influence leader selection (Langan & Deuschel, 2025; Preston & Carton, 2024). Yet, these two constructs have not been examined together.

To date, the glass cliff phenomenon, which suggests that ethnic minority leaders are more likely than White leaders to be appointed to precarious leadership positions, has been examined exclusively with regards to permanent leadership roles (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2016). Yet, interim leadership roles, defined as 'purpose-specific appointments...for a designed short term, to fulfill a designated mandate to lead and manage during periods of change' (Fisher et al., 2024, p. 6), often are assumed to arise from organisational failure and conceptually overlap with scholarly

ideas about the glass cliff phenomenon. However, not all interim leadership roles are equally precarious. The level of precarity inherent in interim leadership roles can vary widely depending on the role's scope, mandate, and expected duration (Mooney et al., 2012). Given that these roles have varying levels of risk and opportunity, the framing of interim leadership roles (He & Zhu, 2020; Mooney et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2024) and how those role risks and opportunities are subjectively perceived (Knox et al., 2014), rather than its objective status, may be a crucial factor in the leadership selection process at both the candidate and evaluator levels. In parallel, the interim leadership literature primarily focuses on the organisational (e.g., structural or performance) outcomes through archival data designs (Ballinger & Marcel, 2009; Hendricks et al., 2024; Langan & Deuschel, 2025). As a result, limited attention has been paid to how the social identity of an interim leader (i.e., their membership in social groups such as ethnicity) shapes appointment choices in this context (see Turner et al., 1979; Turner, 1975), particularly in experimental designs (Fisher et al., 2024; London, 2020).

The unexplored intersection between the interim leadership and glass cliff literature presents a significant opportunity. If ethnic minority leaders are more likely to be appointed to interim positions reflective of precarity (e.g., limited career opportunities or low likelihood of becoming permanent leader), it may represent a previously unexplored operationalisation of the glass cliff. Despite evidence suggesting that interim positions can be used to provide atypical leaders (e.g., ethnic minority leaders) with experiential opportunities to display leadership potential (Fisher et al., 2024; Mooney et al., 2012), the costs and negative associations linked to potential leadership failure in such roles may outweigh these developmental benefits (Glass & Cook, 2019). Without a nuanced understanding of how interim leadership and interim

leadership role precariousness interact with leader ethnicity, important contextual criteria may be overlooked in existing models of leadership diversity.

To address this gap, we link the interim leadership concept from the organisational psychology and management literature and the glass cliff concept from the social psychology literature to examine whether interim leadership appointments present another glass cliff context for ethnic minority leaders. Across two pre-registered experiments, we test whether 1) ethnic minority leadership candidates will be more likely to be selected for interim, compared to permanent, leadership positions; a pattern not observed for their ethnic majority counterparts, and 2) the perception and framing of interim leadership role precariousness plays a role in the appointment preference for ethnic minority leadership candidates. We do so by examining participants' perceptions of precariousness associated with leadership roles (see Study 4 & 5) and via an experimental manipulation of how interim leadership roles are framed (see Study 5; see also Mooney et al., 2012).

In integrating these different literatures, this research contributes both to the interim leadership and glass cliff literatures in three important ways. First, it extends operationalisation of the glass cliff framework to non-permanent leadership appointments, completing the first experimental test of the phenomenon in the interim leadership context. Second, it provides empirical evidence into how perceived role precariousness impacts the selection of ethnic minority leaders in interim leadership positions, and this impact differs based on how the interim position is framed (e.g., scope of responsibility, role duration). Third, it makes a practical contribution in highlighting the importance of framing interim leadership roles and how such framing

may shift the preference for leadership candidates based on perceived precarity inherent to the interim role.

### **7.2 The Glass Cliff**

Leadership selection decisions are often shaped by perceptions of prototypicality, which typically assume White middle age leaders (Petsko & Rosette, 2023; William et al., 2022) and therefore disproportionately favor ethnic majority leaders (Lord et al., 1984; Rosette et al., 2008). However, there is growing evidence that these prototypicality norms may become more flexible or strategically altered under certain organisational conditions, such as crisis or poor performance, creating conditions for ethnic minority leaders to be considered for precarious leadership roles (Gündemir et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2024). This phenomenon, known as the glass cliff, suggests that under precarious organisational contexts ethnic minority leaders are more likely to be selected than their ethnic majority counterparts (Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Ryan et al., 2016). Some possible consequences of glass cliff appointments of ethnic minority leaders entail experiencing heightened criticism, having shorter tenures, and being subject to an increased likelihood of being replaced by an ethnic majority leader (Cook & Glass, 2013b, Glass & Cook, 2019; Obenauer & Langer, 2019). Taken together, glass cliff appointments not only disadvantage ethnic minority leaders, but also further entrench the implicit prototypicality of ethnic majority leaders, a phenomenon often referred to as “think manager, think White” (Gündemir et al., 2014), by positioning failure as a result of ethnic minority leadership (Glass & Cook, 2019).

If crisis can alter the normative perceptions of the leadership prototype, then the structural characteristics of leadership roles themselves (e.g., interim vs. permanent appointments) may also impact appointment decisions. Despite the prominence of

context in the extant glass cliff literature (Ryan et al., 2016), all glass cliff studies have operationalised poor performance, crises, and organisational instability in implied permanent leadership contexts. This assumption neglects the distinct type of precarity associated with interim leadership roles, which are defined by limited operational scope and increased role ambiguity, as a relevant context for biased leadership appointments (Ballinger & Marcel, 2009; Fisher et al., 2024; Mooney et al., 2012). Interim leaders are frequently appointed in various organisational scenarios including abrupt, unforeseen leadership transitions or when a potential successor is not identified or immediately available (Berns & Klarnar, 2017; Mooney et al., 2016). The latent characteristics of interim leadership may not only naturally replicate precarious conditions in which the glass cliff is likely to occur but also represent a concentrated form of organisational precarity (Ballinger & Marcel, 2009). As such, interim leadership presents an important new context for testing the generalisability of glass cliff dynamics.

### **7.3 Interim Leadership**

Interim leadership roles tend to arise from leadership succession events that deviate from any pre-existing organisational succession plans (Hambrick & Lee, 2025; Mooney et al., 2013). Although definitionally neutral in fulfilling a designated mandate to lead and manage during periods of change, interim leadership appointments, in reality, are associated with poor organisational performance that led to the prior leader's dismissal or poor organisational planning in leaders leaving before a hand-picked successor could be identified (Liang et al., 2012; Mooney et al., 2016; Woods et al., 2020). Perhaps for this reason, interim leadership appointments are also associated with a continuation of negative organisational outcomes (Ballinger & Marcel, 2009; Langan & Deuschel, 2025; Wu et al., 2021), as the inherent challenges of the role and the

disruptive nature of the succession (e.g., health leave, death of prior leader) may exacerbate existing organisational issues or create new ones.

Although the rationale for interim appointments is to avoid rushed permanent leadership appointments (Hambrick & Lee, 2025; Mooney et al., 2012), the implementation of interim leadership seems to disrupt or stagnate organisational processes to the point of reducing overall firm performance (Langan & Deuschel, 2025). For example, evidence suggests that firm financial performance, as measured by return on assets and Tobin Q, is significantly lower after the use of an interim leader in succession events compared firms that appoint permanent leaders (Ballinger & Marcel, 2009; Langan & Deuschel, 2025). Interim leadership also has negative consequences on corporate long-term investments (e.g., research and development), which was found to be significantly lower during interim leadership appointments compared to permanent ones (Wu et al., 2021). The extant literature would suggest a circular pattern in which interim leadership arises from poor organisational performance and then leads to further poor organisational outcomes in the future when compared to firms that appoint permanent leaders (Fisher et al., 2024). Despite the negative connotations identified to surround this particular leadership role, research may also suggest that interim leadership may serve more of a psychological purpose in how it is utilised.

While interim leadership appointments are assumed to be a short term solution to organisational failures, evidence suggests their ultimate utility may extend beyond financial performance or efficiency-seeking measures (Fisher et al., 2024; London, 2020). Interim leaders are frequently appointed in hopes to symbolically pivot an organisation through adversity (Ballinger & Marcel, 2009; Mooney et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2024). Accordingly, interim leaders' value may be derived from producing

developmental or psycho-social returns, such as signaling change in performance (Connelly et al., 2016), impression management following organisational wrongdoing (Gangloff et al., 2016) or investing in leadership development (Fisher et al., 2024; London, 2020). Through these psychological mechanisms, conceptual links between the glass cliff and interim leadership begin to emerge.

Unlike the glass cliff phenomenon, which is largely examined through a social psychological lens, interim leadership appointments, a concept primarily discussed in organisational behavior and management literature, have not been systematically explored through the lens of social identity. Yet, the extant interim leadership literature has established connections that mirror glass cliff related findings. For example, interim leadership appointments have been found to provide real-time, high stakes experiential leadership opportunities to develop and test leadership potential, particularly for leaders that lack such experience from underrepresented social groups (e.g., ethnic minority leaders; Fisher et al., 2024; London, 2020). Much like signalling effects found in the glass cliff literature (for examples, see Kulich et al., 2015; Reinwald et al., 2022; Takizawa et al., 2024), interim leaders, particularly those appointed following organisational failure, are seen as positive signals of change in restoring external stakeholder confidence (Connelly et al., 2016). As interim leadership has yet to be systematically examined as a potential context for glass cliff appointments, we proposed and empirically tested the following hypothesis, positioning interim leadership as a proxy for heightened leadership role precarity:

**Hypothesis 5:** Ethnic minority leadership candidates will be more likely to be selected for interim, compared to permanent, leadership positions; a pattern not observed for their ethnic majority counterparts.

### *7.3.1 Subjective Perceptions of Precarity*

In addition to the exclusive operationalisation of permanent leadership roles in the extant glass cliff research, the way precarity is framed may impact the ability to identify the phenomenon. While organisational precarity has been typically manipulated in experimental vignette designs, most studies to date assess whether participants recognise an organisational context as precarious by often contrasting low- and high-performing scenarios (Morgenroth et al., 2020). This binary framing, however, overlooks the degree or severity of the leadership role precarity, which may differentially shape leadership appointment decisions (Rink et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2016; Takizawa et al., 2024). Consequently, most glass cliff studies assume role precarity as a homogeneous construct and do not account for variation in how precarious a role may be perceived to be (Reinwald et al., 2022). Yet, subjective experiences of precarity, both from the candidate and evaluators perspective, can critically shape how leadership candidates are evaluated and ultimately appointed (Albayrak-Aydemir & Gleibs, 2022; Allan et al., 2021).

Research on precarious work suggests that objectively low quality roles (e.g., housekeeping jobs in the hotel industry) may be perceived differently depending on individual experience (Adler & Adler, 2004; Knox et al., 2014). For example, Knox and colleagues (2014) found that hotel housekeepers, a profession qualified by low pay, organisational support, and progression opportunity, can differ in their perception of their roles based on subjective experience (e.g., willingness to work). Applying this

construct to leadership appointments, a failure to measure perceived precarity may obscure subjective role perceptions crucial to the glass cliff phenomenon. Hence, the present study addresses this gap by empirically investigating how varying levels of perceived role precarity influence the selection likelihood of ethnic minority versus ethnic majority leadership candidates, and puts forward the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 6:** Ethnic minority leadership candidates will be more likely to be selected for leadership roles as evaluators' perceived precarity of the role increases. This relationship will not be expected to emerge for ethnic majority leadership candidates.<sup>8</sup>

### *7.3.2 Interim Leadership Role Types*

While evidence exists to conceptually link interim leadership to precarious leadership contexts, such as the glass cliff, research has often considered interim leadership as a uniform construct. However, growing empirical evidence suggests that interim leadership can vary significantly in responsibility, stability, and opportunity, leading to differing levels of structural role precarity (He & Zhu, 2020; Mooney et al., 2012). Mooney and colleagues (2012) proposed a typology of interim leadership roles differentiated by role responsibility, duration, and complexity. Drawing on this framework, He and Zhu (2020) utilised two contrasting interim leadership types in their research on organisational outcomes following CEO succession events: “contenders”, appointed with the potential to become the permanent leader, and “transitional leaders” (i.e., seat warmer, Mooney et al., 2012) tasked with organisational continuity following

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<sup>8</sup> Hypothesis 2 did not feature as part of the pre-registration for Study 4 but was then included in the formal pre-registration for Study 5.

sudden leader departures (e.g., death or medical challenges). Evidence suggests that appointing a contender tends to have more positive organisational impacts (Chen et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2024), while transitional interim leaders are less likely to enact strategy change and instead passively leading to maintain the status quo (Mooney et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2024). This point of differentiation demonstrates that interim leadership roles vary meaningfully in role precarity, with important implications for organisational outcomes depending on the motivation for the interim appointment.

Given these distinctions, it is critical to consider how an interim role is framed may impact appointments based on leader candidate demographic characteristics. Specifically, in line with the glass cliff phenomenon, this research predicts that ethnic minority leadership candidates will be disproportionately appointed to interim leadership roles framed by precarity compared to their ethnic majority counterparts. Hence, it proposes that:

**Hypothesis 7:** An ethnic minority candidate (as opposed to an ethnic majority candidate) will be more likely to be selected for an interim leadership role high in precarity (e.g., no consideration for the permanent role and has no impact on strategic planning and long term decisions) than interim leadership roles low in precarity (e.g., strong consideration for the permanent role and has impact on strategic planning and long term decisions), and interim roles ambiguous in precarity (e.g., consideration for the permanent role and impact on

strategic planning and long term decisions is unspecified) will be situated in-between.

### **7.4 The Present Research**

Although most studies of interim leadership rely on archival data designs (Fisher et al., 2024), the present research used experimental vignette designs in the present research in order to test hypotheses regarding interim leadership appointments. Experimental vignette studies can complement archival data studies by adding a high degree of internal validity often missing in non-experimental research designs (Wason et al., 2002). This methodology enables the systematic manipulation and control of predictor variables while maintaining high experimental realism through curated, realistic scenarios constructed with detailed narratives and visual cues (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). It is also uniquely suited to measuring subjective psychological variables, such as participants' perceptions of a role's precariousness, which cannot be captured through archival data alone. As such, participants were presented with scenarios that only differed in terms of the leadership role type (permanent vs. interim in Study 4; secure vs. no information vs. precarious interim role types in Study 5) and the selected candidates' ethnicity (ethnic majority vs. ethnic minority) allowing us to single out the effects most relevant for the participants' preferred choice.

As experimental vignette methodology avoids possible confounding effects often associated with archival designs in leadership succession, it is particularly valuable for examining perceptions around interim leadership appointments (Antonakis et al., 2010). Additionally, experimental vignettes can be designed to specify specific interim leadership types (i.e., secure or precarious) which may not be available or easily

decipherable in archival data designs. While external validity remains a challenge in experimental vignettes, this approach serves as a strong complement to the existing evidence on interim leadership outcomes predominantly derived from archival designs (Fisher et al., 2024).

### 7.5 Study 4

The goal of Study 4 was to test the prediction that ethnic minority leadership candidates will be more likely selected for interim, compared to permanent, leadership positions; a pattern not observed for their ethnic majority counterparts (Hypothesis 5). In this study, we asked participants to imagine that they worked for a football club and were responsible for making leadership appointments. The football industry was selected because it remains an industry where ethnic minority leaders are highly underrepresented (Bradbury et al., 2016) and where associations with the “White leader” prototype are strong (Rosette et al., 2008). This context allowed for examination of whether interim leadership roles, like glass cliff appointments, which fall outside normative leadership perceptions, might elicit a preference for ethnic minority leaders (Carton & Rosette, 2011).

#### 7.5.1 Method

**Participants.** A total of 250 participants who had prior hiring experience were recruited through Prolific to partake in the study in exchange for financial compensation. Participants who failed the attention check were excluded ( $n = 11$ ). Finally, the sample consisted of 239 UK-based participants (210 White, 16 Asian, 10 Black, 3 biracial or other). Participants were, on average, 47.5 years old ( $SD = 12.6$ ) with an average work experience of 26.6 years ( $SD = 12.3$ ). As the context of the study

was the football industry, participants were asked their familiarity with the industry on a 7 point scale (1 = *Very Little Familiarity*, 7 = *Very High Familiarity*). Participants reported a moderate level of familiarity with the football industry ( $M = 3.48$ ;  $SD = 2.19$ ). A sensitivity analysis revealed that the final sample size could detect a small/medium effect ( $OR = 1.57$ ) through logistic regression (Faul et al., 2009).

**Study Procedure.** On the platform Prolific, participants were provided with the study materials and a cover letter outlining the study and informed consent details. Those who opted to take part completed the questionnaire in approximately 8 minutes. Participation was voluntary and responses were anonymous. Study and consent procedures were approved in accordance with the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee (Research Ethics Committee Reference: DCUREC/2024/157) and pre-registered on AsPredicted (AsPredicted Reference: #210276).

This study employs a 2 leadership role type (interim vs. permanent leadership role) between-subjects design in which participants were randomly assigned to one of the two role type conditions.

**Leadership Role Type Manipulation.** Leadership role type was manipulated via a fictitious job description describing an open leadership role in a football organisation. Leadership role type (interim vs permanent leadership role) was summarily described as:

You will read about a football club searching to appoint a (interim) permanent manager to (temporarily) lead the club following the sudden departure of their current manager. The appointed manager will step into the club with (no) security of tenure and a (fixed term) permanent contract.

Participants then read the fictitious job description which outlined the role descriptions and key responsibilities for the permanent (interim) role : “Kingston FC is seeking a(n Interim) First Team Manager to oversee the club’s long-term (immediate) needs during this transitional period.” For the interim condition, role description further included “The Interim First Team Manager will be tasked with leading the team while the club continues to explore a long-term managerial solution.” For the permanent manager condition, role descriptions included “This role is a permanent contract with a focus on building a sustainable future for Kingston FC.” With the exception of the above descriptions, all other job description materials were identical. For the manipulation check, participants chose whether, or not, the leadership vacancy was for a permanent or interim leadership position. Participants who failed to correctly identify their experimental condition were excluded from the final analysis.

**Leadership Candidate Profiles.** Participants then read candidate profiles from the top two shortlisted candidates: Mike Veriman (a White, British man) and Anthony Olukayode (a Black, British man). We conveyed candidate ethnicity through a candidate name typically associated with Black ethnic identity (Wood et al., 2009) and a headshot photograph of a Black individual from the Chicago Face database (Ma et al., 2015). Both headshots were matched on key characteristics including age, facial expression, attractiveness, warmth, and competence. The candidates’ age, level of managerial experience (“current” and “previous roles”), time spent in each previous role, playing career length (e.g., 10 years), and role qualifications were described as being equal. The order of the candidates was randomised per participant. Participants, then, made a final decision on the selection of one of the two candidates. The study

concluded with demographic questions (e.g., age, ethnic minority status) and a participant debrief statement.

### **7.5.2 Measures**

**Participants' Perception of Leadership Role Precarity.** Participants were asked to assess the open leadership role on the level of precariousness they associated with the open leadership role (i.e., “How would you rate the level of precariousness or riskiness associated to this open managerial role?”, 7-point rating scale 1= “Extremely Low Risk” to 7 = “Extremely High Risk”,  $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ).

### **7.5.3 Results**

**Manipulation Check.** A manipulation check confirmed that participants perceived the leadership role type manipulation as intended, with 95% of participants correctly identifying the leadership role type. Pass rates were high and comparable across leadership role type conditions.

To check whether precariousness was associated with interim vs permanent leadership roles, we performed an independent samples  $t$  test,  $t(237) = -4.00$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-0.94, -0.33] which showed that interim leadership roles ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) were perceived as significantly more precarious than permanent leadership roles ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ).

**Hypothesis Testing: Candidate Selection.** To test whether ethnic minority leadership candidates were more likely to be chosen than their ethnic majority counterpart for interim leadership roles compared to permanent ones (Hypothesis 5), we conducted a logistic regression with leadership role type (0 = permanent role, 1 = interim role) on the selected candidate's ethnicity (0 = ethnic majority candidate, 1 = ethnic minority candidate). Contrary to Hypothesis 5, ethnic minority candidates were

not preferred for interim leadership roles over permanent leadership roles ( $b = -0.14$ ,  $SE = 0.27$ ,  $p = .591$ ,  $OR = 0.87$ , 95% CI [0.51, 1.46]).

**Exploratory Analysis.** As the literature suggests that interim leadership roles can be perceived differently, we explored whether the variation in participants' perception of leadership role precarity affected their selection of leadership candidate ethnicity. We performed an exploratory analysis to examine whether the relationship between leadership role type on leadership candidate ethnicity was moderated by participants' perceived precarity of the leadership role. The model revealed a significant interaction effect, such that the relationship between leadership role type on selected candidate's ethnicity depended on the participant's perceived precarity of the leadership role ( $b = 0.52$ ,  $SE = 0.24$ ,  $p = .027$ ,  $OR = 1.68$ , 95% CI [1.06, 2.63]). Simple slopes analysis showed that in the interim leadership role condition, the likelihood of selecting an ethnic minority candidate significantly increased as participants' perception of leadership role precarity increased ( $b = 0.42$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ,  $p = .010$ ,  $OR = 1.52$ , 95% CI [0.10, 0.74]). Conversely, in the permanent leadership role condition, participants' perception of leadership role precarity did not significantly affect the likelihood of selecting the ethnic minority candidate ( $b = -0.10$ ,  $SE = 0.17$ ,  $p = .552$ ,  $OR = 0.90$ , 95% CI [-0.43, 0.23]). There was also a significant main effect of leadership role type on selected candidate's ethnicity indicating the ethnic minority candidate was less preferred for interim (vs permanent) leadership roles ( $b = -2.45$ ,  $SE = 1.03$ ,  $p = .018$ ,  $OR = 0.09$ , 95% CI [0.01, 0.72]), inverse to Hypothesis 5. The main effect of participant's perceived precarity on selected candidate's ethnicity was nonsignificant ( $b = -0.10$ ,  $p = .552$ ). This pattern suggests that ethnic minority leaders are not simply preferred for interim roles, but rather that the preference for ethnic minority leaders

emerges only when interim leadership roles are perceived as precarious, an effect that is not observed in permanent roles.

### **7.5.4 Discussion**

In a first test of operationalising the glass cliff within an interim leadership context, Study 4 manipulated the leadership role type (interim vs. permanent) for a vacant leadership position in a football club. Participants were presented with two leadership candidates, one ethnic majority and one ethnic minority, and were asked to select the candidate they would appoint for the vacant position. Hypothesis 5 was not supported as the ethnic minority candidate was not more likely to be chosen for interim roles than permanent ones. However, when exploring whether participants' perception of leadership role precariousness influenced the relationship between leadership role type and selected candidate's ethnicity, an interesting pattern emerged. Specifically, as the participants' perception of leadership role precariousness increased in the interim leadership role, indicating greater precariousness and instability, there was a significant preference for the ethnic minority candidate compared to the ethnic majority candidate (compared to when the participants' perceived precariousness was lower). This finding aligns with the glass cliff phenomenon, suggesting that ethnic minority leaders may be more likely to be selected for precarious leadership roles compared to ethnic majority candidates. However, no similar effect was found in the permanent leadership role condition.

Also of note, the significant main effect of leadership role type on leadership candidate ethnicity indicated that the ethnic minority candidate was less preferred than the ethnic majority candidate for the interim role (compared to the permanent role) when precariousness was controlled for. This result ran counter to Hypothesis 5 and suggests that the interim status of the leadership role is insufficient in conveying the

precarity required to elicit a preference of an ethnic minority candidate. When controlling for leadership role precarity, the prototypical preference for White, male leaders may supersede any implicit precarity associations required to produce a preference for an atypical leader (Gündemir et al., 2014; Rosette et al., 2008). In line with the glass cliff, preference for ethnic minority leaders only emerges when interim leadership roles are perceived as highly precarious, a pattern driven by the significant interaction effect that leads to a shift away from the White leader prototype.

Within this study, two limitations were identified. First, the distribution of political ideology within the sample may have influenced findings. Participants reported left-leaning political orientations and elevated perceptions of racial discrimination in management, which may have led to a higher preference for the ethnic minority candidate and potentially obscured any glass cliff effects tied to interim leadership (Aelenei et al., 2020). Second, qualitative analysis of participant comments suggested that the inclusion of location details in the candidate profiles may have inadvertently biased selection. Specifically, the ethnic majority candidate was described as already being based in the city of the interim role, which may have led participants to prioritise logistical fit over ethnicity. To address these potential limitations and further examine the role of precarity, Study 5 was designed with a refined approach.

### **7.6 Study 5**

Study 5 was designed to better isolate the causal influence of precarity on leadership candidate selection. This involved two key changes. First, Study 5 required balancing the location details across the leadership candidates to mitigate the logistical bias found in Study 4. Second and building on the finding that subjective perception is

key, Study 5 experimentally manipulates interim leadership role precariousness in addition to measuring participants' perceptions of precariousness. This manipulation created three clear conditions with a gradual change in framed interim role precariousness: an interim role that is high in precariousness, an interim role that is ambiguous in precariousness (replicating the unmanipulated interim condition from Study 4), and an interim role that is low in precariousness. This refined design allowed us to test whether explicit interim leadership role framing influences the appointment of ethnic minority leaders, while simultaneously confirming the interplay between objective framing and subjective perception in driving the conditional preference observed in Study 4.

### ***7.6.1 Interim Leadership Role Type Pre-test***

A pre-test utilizing the typology developed by Mooney et al. (2012) assessed six interim leadership role types (“Contender”, “Fixer”, “Groomer”, “Marketer”, “Cleaner”, and “Seat Warmer”) and their associated scope of responsibility and permanency in terms of perceived role precariousness. An ANOVA revealed significant differences between interim leadership role types ( $p < .001$ ), with Tukey's HSD test showing that the interim leadership type “Seat Warmer” had significantly lower mean scores of role security than “Contender”, “Fixer”, “Groomer”, and “Marketer” (differences ranging from -1.17 to -2.88, all  $ps < .001$ ). These results suggest that “Seat Warmer” is the most precarious interim leadership type and will be used as the interim leadership role type high in precariousness in Study 5. Conversely, the “Contender” role type was significantly more secure than “Seat Warmer” (mean difference of -2.88,  $p < .001$ ), “Groomer” (mean difference of -1.71,  $p < .001$ ), and “Marketer” (mean difference of -1.06,  $p < .001$ ), making it the interim leadership role low in precariousness in Study 5.

Additionally, we adapted study materials from Study 4 to control for potential location effects in the candidate descriptions.

### 7.6.2 Method

**Participants.** A total of 300 British participants who had prior hiring experience were recruited through Prolific to partake in the study in exchange for financial compensation. We excluded participants who failed the comprehension check designed to confirm experimental condition assignment ( $n = 13$ ). After exclusion, the final sample consisted of 287 participants (241 White, 16 Asian, 25 Black, 4 biracial or other). Participants were, on average, 46.4 years old ( $SD = 12.3$ ) with an average work experience of 25 years ( $SD = 11.8$ ). As the context of the study was, again, the football industry, participants were asked their familiarity with the industry on a 7 point scale (1 = *Very Little Familiarity*, 7 = *Very High Familiarity*). Participants reported a moderate level of familiarity with the football industry ( $M = 4.28$ ;  $SD = 2.25$ ). A sample size of 287 represented the ability to detect a medium effect size ( $OR = 1.54$ ).

**Study Procedure.** On the platform Prolific, participants were provided with the study materials and a cover letter outlining the study and informed consent details. Those who opted to take part completed the questionnaire in approximately 12 minutes. Participation was voluntary and responses were anonymous. Study and consent procedures were approved in accordance with the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee (Research Ethics Committee Reference: DCUREC/2024/157) and pre-registered on AsPredicted (AsPredicted Reference: #231834).

This study employed a 3 interim leadership role type (interim leadership role high in precarity vs. interim leadership role ambiguous in precarity vs. interim

leadership role low in precarity) between-subjects design in which participants were randomly assigned to one of the three interim leadership role type conditions.

**Interim Leadership Role Type Manipulation.** Leadership role type was manipulated via a fictitious job description describing an open leadership role in a football organisation. Leadership role type (interim vs permanent leadership role) was summarily introduced as follows:

The club (has stated that the interim manager will be strongly/has stated that the interim manager will not be/has not stated that the interim manager will be) considered for the permanent position.

In the interim leadership role low in precarity condition, participants were told that the interim appointee will have impact on strategic planning and long term decisions. In the interim leadership role high in precarity condition, participants were told the interim appointee has no impact on strategic planning and long term decisions. Within the interim leadership role ambiguous in precarity, participants were told that the interim appointee's impact on strategic planning and long term decisions were unspecified.

### ***7.6.3 Measures***

The shortlisted candidate material from Study 4 was replicated in Study 5. Likewise, the signalling change measure used in Chapter 6 (Study 2 and 3) was replicated in Study 5.

**Comprehension Check.** For the comprehension check, participants indicated whether the club's stated position about the interim appointee's potential for the permanent role was "no consideration for the permanent position", "strong

consideration for the permanent position”, or “unspecified on consideration for the permanent position”. Participants responding incorrectly were excluded from the final analysis ( $n = 13$ ).

**Manipulation Check.** Participant’s perceived precarity was measured using a 6-item scale adapted from established precarious work measures (Creed et al., 2020; Hellgren et al., 1999; O’Neill & Sevastos, 2013; Vander Elst et al., 2013). The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency across the full sample ( $\alpha = .86$ ;  $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ), confirming that the items reliably measured perceptions of role precarity regardless of condition. Sample items included: “This leadership role offers little long-term security” and “Even with strong performance, the person in this role might not remain long-term”.

#### 7.6.4 Results

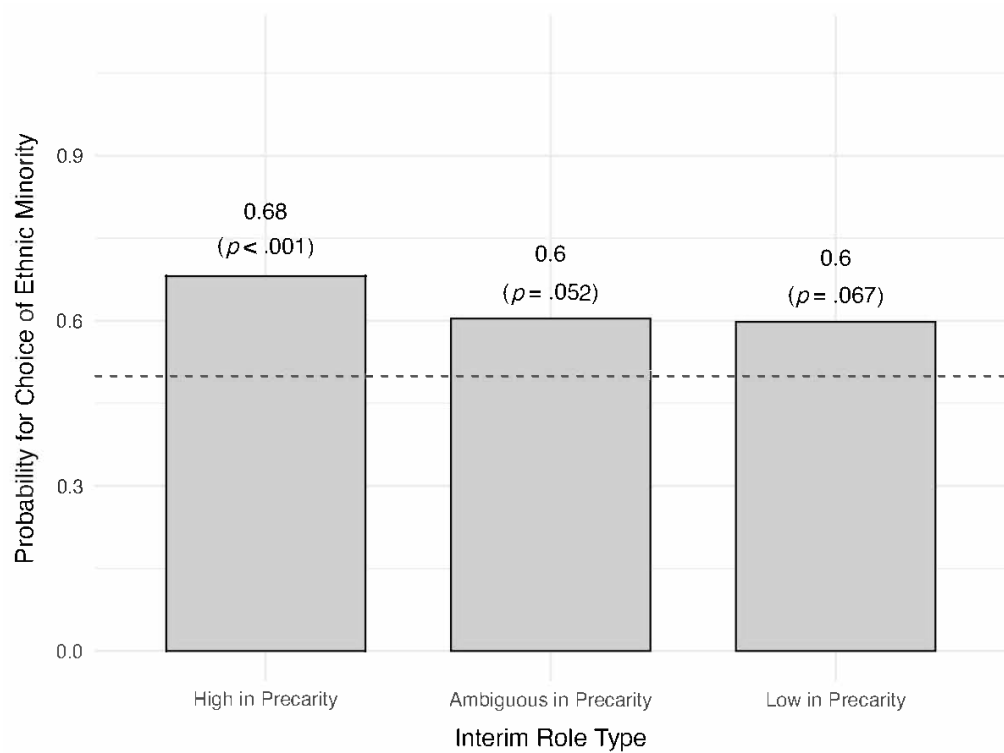
**Manipulation Check.** As expected by the gradual manipulation of precarity, the interim leadership role high in precarity was perceived to be most precarious ( $M = 5.96$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ), followed by the interim leadership role ambiguous in precarity ( $M = 5.25$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ), with the interim leadership low in precarity perceived as least precarious ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ). A one-way ANOVA confirmed a significant effect of interim leadership role type condition on participant perceived precarity, indicating that perceptions of precarity varied across the three interim leadership role types ( $F(2, 284) = 106.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.43$ ).

**Hypothesis Testing.** Figure 1 highlights the probabilities for the ethnic minority candidate to be selected for each interim role type. Hypothesis 7 states that an ethnic minority candidate (as opposed to an ethnic majority candidate) will be more likely to be selected for an interim leadership role high in precarity than interim leadership roles

low in precarity, and interim roles ambiguous in precarity will be situated in-between. To test whether ethnic minority candidates are more likely to be selected in interim leadership roles high in precarity (compared to interim leadership roles low, with interim roles ambiguous in precarity in-between), orthogonal contrasts were computed. The gradual contrast (C1) positioned interim roles high in precarity (coded 1) against interim roles ambiguous (coded 0) or low in precarity (coded -1). The residual contrast (C2) was coded with interim roles high and low in precarity = -0.5 and the interim role ambiguous in precarity coded = 1. A logistic regression was conducted on selected candidate's ethnicity (0 = ethnic majority candidate, 1 = ethnic minority) with C1 and C2 contrasts. The logistic regression model revealed that the contrast representing the gradual preference for an ethnic minority candidate (C1) was not statistically significant ( $b = 0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $OR = 1.20$ ,  $p = .234$ , 95% CI [0.89, 1.62]). The residual contrast (C2) was also non-significant ( $b = -0.10$ ,  $SE = 0.17$ ,  $OR = 0.90$ ,  $p = .549$ , 95% CI [0.65, 1.27]).

### **Figure 7.1**

*Probabilities for the Ethnic Minority Candidate to be Chosen for Interim Leadership Roles Depending on the Level of Precarity Associated with the Interim Role Type*



*Note.* P-values represent differences from chance (50%) based on binomial tests.

Although the regression model did not yield statistically significant effects, follow-up descriptive and inferential analysis suggested that varying levels of interim leadership role precarity influenced the likelihood of selecting an ethnic minority candidate. Ethnic minority candidates were selected more than the ethnic majority candidate for the interim leadership role high in precarity (see Figure 1). Within condition analysis revealed that the selection of the ethnic minority candidate (compared to the ethnic majority candidate) was statistically significant in the interim role high in precarity condition ( $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $h = .36$ , 95% CI [0.58, 0.77]) and was not significant in the other two conditions (ambiguous in precarity,  $p = .052$ ; Cohen's  $h = .21$ ; low in precarity,  $p = .067$ ; Cohen's  $h = .20$ ). Overall, the results could not support Hypothesis 7 at conventional levels of significance. However, descriptive and inferential evidence suggest a consistent pattern in the predicted direction of a

preference for an ethnic minority candidate being highest in interim roles high in precariousness. The selection rates in both the interim role low in precariousness and the interim roles ambiguous in precariousness conditions were not significantly different from chance, and therefore, no reliable conclusions can be drawn about the preference for an ethnic minority interim candidate in these two conditions.

Analyses were conducted to further examine theoretical links between interim leadership and the glass cliff phenomenon. Although not formally hypothesised, the following analyses on signalling change motivations in leadership appointments and perceptions of perceived precariousness were pre-registered as exploratory investigations. To test whether an ethnic minority candidate (compared to an ethnic majority candidate) was perceived as a stronger signal of change in an interim appointment, a logistic regression was conducted where leadership candidate ethnicity (ethnic minority vs. ethnic majority) was regressed on signaling change. Results revealed that the ethnic minority candidate was seen as a more likely signal of change ( $M = 4.78$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ) than ethnic majority candidates ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) across conditions ( $b = 0.42$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $OR = 1.52$ ,  $p = .001$ , 95% CI [1.18, 1.97]). This finding demonstrates a general association between ethnic minority leadership and the perception of representing change, mirroring observations in existing literature that atypical leaders are seen as signals of organisational change (e.g., Kulich et al., 2015; Robinson et al., 2024). While this result is consistent with the signalling motivation hypothesis of the glass cliff phenomenon, further analysis would be needed to confirm this motivation is uniquely driving selection specifically within the interim leadership context.

In establishing a further link between the glass cliff and interim leadership appointments, we explored the participants' perception of perceived role precariousness as a

standalone predictor of selected candidate ethnicity. To do so, a binary logistic regression was conducted with leadership candidate ethnicity (ethnic minority vs. ethnic majority) as the dependent variable, regressed on the main effects of participants' perception of perceived role precarity and leadership role type conditions. Results revealed a significant main effect of participants' perception of perceived role precarity ( $b = 0.22$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $OR = 1.31$ ,  $p = .031$ , 95% CI [1.03, 1.67]). Specifically, after controlling for the leadership role type condition, a higher participants' perception of perceived role precarity was associated with a greater likelihood of selecting the ethnic minority candidate. This demonstrates that the subjective experience of precarity is a significant predictor of the glass cliff effect, consistent with the findings of Study 4. In contrast, the main effects of the leadership role type conditions were nonsignificant (High in Precarity condition:  $b = 0.15$ ,  $p = .636$ ; Low in Precarity condition:  $b = 0.35$ ,  $p = .315$ ). This suggests that objective interim leadership role framing alone was insufficient to drive the selection preference; rather, it is the participant's subjective assessment of interim leadership role precarity that uniquely predicts the preference for ethnic minority leadership. These trends, while exploratory and not part of the pre-registered analysis plan, may indicate a stronger link between interim leadership and the glass cliff. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution.

### **7.6.5 Discussion**

Study 5 investigated the likelihood of appointing an ethnic minority candidate over an ethnic majority candidate depending on the interim leadership role type, which was described as being an interim role high in precarity, ambiguous in precarity, or low in precarity. This study tested a gradual increase in appointing the ethnic minority candidate as interim roles were described as more precarious. While the highest

proportion of appointments for the ethnic minority candidate occurred in the interim leadership role high in precarity (compared to the other two conditions), the test for a gradual trend in appointment, Hypothesis 7, failed to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Therefore, Hypothesis 7, which suggested a linear increase in appointment, could not be supported. This indicates that although the data showed a tendency in the hypothesised direction, the experimental framing alone did not produce a statistically reliable effect on a candidate's appointment.

However, the ethnic minority candidate was preferred when all conditions were considered combined with a statistically significant preference in the interim leadership role high in precarity. This finding aligns with the glass cliff phenomenon in which ethnic minority candidates would be more likely to be selected in leadership roles high in precarity compared to their ethnic majority counterparts. Exploratory analysis added further support to an interim leadership and glass cliff phenomenon link as ethnic minority leaders were more likely selected as the participants' perception of interim leadership role precarity increased.

### **7.7 General Discussion**

To date, the glass cliff literature has predominantly focused on precarious leadership within permanent leadership appointments, with little to no attention given to interim leadership positions. This gap in the literature is noteworthy given the increasing frequency of interim leadership appointments, which typically follow organisational precarity (Fisher et al., 2024). While the interim leadership literature has primarily relied on archival data to assess the impact of these roles on organisational outcomes such as firm performance (e.g., Ballinger & Marcel, 2009; Kavadis et al.,

2022) and team turnover (e.g., Hendrick et al., 2024; Marcel et al., 2017), the demographic distribution of those appointed interim leadership positions has not been systematically explored (Lipscomb et al., 2023). To address this gap, we designed two experimental vignettes attempting to establish a connection between interim leadership and organisational precarity through the lens of the glass cliff phenomenon (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Specifically, this study sought to determine whether ethnic minority leaders are more likely to be appointed to interim roles (compared to permanent roles) and whether this pattern is influenced and amplified by varying interim leadership appointment conditions.

This study provides the first experimental evidence in this underexplored area: (1) the preference for ethnic minority leaders in interim leadership roles as part of the glass cliff phenomenon; and (2) the influence of role precarity on the demographic preference for interim leaders. The present studies tested the core role of precarity in two distinct ways: Study 4 experimentally contrasted the inherent precarity of interim leadership against permanent leadership, and Study 5 extended this by contrasting interim leadership roles specifically manipulated to be high, ambiguous, or low in precarity. Although we did not find support for an increased preference for ethnic minority leaders in interim (compared to permanent) leadership roles, we found that perceived precariousness played a crucial role in leadership selection. Specifically, an ethnic minority candidate was significantly more likely to be appointed to an interim leadership position (compared to a permanent one) only when that role was perceived as being high in precarity. These results align with the glass cliff hypothesis, as ethnic minority leaders were more likely to be appointed to precarious leadership roles compared to their ethnic majority counterparts.

Interim leadership roles are often presumed to be precarious, largely due to their association with organisational failure and crisis (Ballinger & Marcel, 2009; Mooney et al., 2013; Mooney et al., 2016). However, the results suggest that implicit perceptions of precarity in interim leadership may not be universal. Research on precarious work indicates that both objective (e.g., pay) and subjective (e.g., alignment to current personal preference) interpretation on job quality influences perceptions of precarious roles (Knox et al., 2014). Contextual factors and an individual's position in the labour market can make precarious work more or less appealing (Jankowski, 2024).

Individuals use subjective job characteristics (e.g., career advancement, training & experience, etc.) to justify their attraction towards precarious work (Belardi et al., 2020). From the ethnic minority leader perspective, who may have fewer opportunities in permanent leadership positions, a candidate may actively seek out precarious interim leadership roles using subjective justifications based on opportunity potential (Glass & Cook, 2019). From the organisational perspective, a lack of consideration of interim role precarity may affect how the role will be framed and subsequently affect recruitment (Findlay et al., 2017).

The findings suggest that interim leadership is not a monolithic role type; the precarity associated with interim leadership roles can vary based on framing (Mooney et al., 2012). While interim leadership remains underexplored compared to permanent leadership in the succession literature (Gentry et al., 2021), less is known about the effects of varying interim leadership role types. However, recent findings suggest that interim leaders viewed as contenders for permanent leadership roles tend to have a more positive impact on organisational performance than interim leaders serving as seat warmers or transitional interim leaders (Zhao et al., 2024). The operational scope given

to interim leaders by role type not only impacts performance but also the likelihood of permanent appointment following interim leadership periods. For example, Chen and colleagues (2015) found that interim leaders with greater operational scope, such as influence over earnings, were more likely to become permanent leaders. These findings indicate that a preference for ethnic minority leaders to interim leadership roles high in precarity may limit their ability to drive strong organisational performance, thereby reducing their likelihood of permanent leadership appointments. These findings suggest a double penalty for ethnic minority interim leaders, who are placed in interim leadership roles with lower chances of success which ultimately harms their future leadership prospects.

### ***7.7.1 Practical Implications***

The findings from the present study on interim leadership appointments offer crucial insights for organisational practice. The present research demonstrated that the perception of interim role precarity significantly impacts the likelihood of selecting an ethnic minority candidate. Given organisations' responsibility for crafting job quality perceptions (Findlay et al., 2017), how interim roles are framed and titled becomes critically important. Previous research indicates that the specific titling of interim leadership roles, such as "Acting leader" or "Interim leader" influences perceptions of that leader's control, decision-making power, and can create a sense of organisational ambiguity for team members (Farquhar, 1995). The way interim leadership roles are framed has also been found to impact organisational trust between the interim appointee and the organisation as well as future organisational performance (Liang et al., 2012). For ethnic minority leaders appointed to high-precarity interim roles, a lack of deliberate consideration for the technical title attributed to different interim role types

can further diminish their leadership legitimacy once appointed to the role (Farquhar, 1995).

The implications for the interim appointee's future organisational prospects are particularly notable, as interim roles high in precarity tend to be transitional roles with little opportunity for permanent hire (Zhao et al., 2024). Employees that experience involuntary demotion (i.e., being relieved from interim leadership to an old subordinate role) have been shown to exhibit increased turnover intention, lower motivation, and lower organisational commitment (Hennekam & Ananthram, 2020). As internal interim appointees (compared to external) are seen as most suitable for interim roles (Liang et al., 2012), ethnic minority interim leaders being promoted to high precarity interim roles within their own organisations may face considerable risk to their long-term standing and career trajectory in the organisation. This effect may be attributed to interim leaders often being perceived as holding dual roles (e.g., the interim role and connection to their prior role), leading to potential ambiguity among colleagues when they eventually revert to their former roles with reduced scope and managerial authority (Fisher et al., 2024).

From an organisational perspective, the scope of responsibilities associated with interim roles, particularly those defined by their level of precarity, can create significant challenges for the role holder both during and after their interim leadership appointment. For instance, an internal candidate brought in to implement cost-cutting measures may face heightened scrutiny upon returning to their prior responsibilities (Woods et al., 2020). Given the association of interim leadership roles high in precarity with negatively framed responsibilities (e.g., "Fixer", "Cleaner", or "Seatwarmer"; Mooney et al., 2012), ethnic minority interim leaders executing these duties in an

interim capacity may find their standing in the organisation and amongst colleagues adversely affected upon their return to prior roles. Consequently, organisations risk increasing turnover intentions among high-value ethnic minority employees without carefully considering how interim leadership role types and their associated responsibilities can influence long-term organisational satisfaction for both the appointee and their colleagues (Findlay et al., 2017; Liang et al., 2012). Therefore, it is critical for organisations to establish clear communication regarding the purpose, expectations, and future pathways for all interim leaders, particularly those in interim roles high in precarity, to mitigate potential negative effects to career progression and organisational commitment.

### ***7.7.2 Limitations And Future Directions***

While this study offers significant contributions, it is not without limitations, which concurrently highlight promising directions for future research. The exploratory nature of this research to examine the appointment preference of interim leaders based on perceived and manipulated role precarity meant other variables relevant to the interim leadership literature (i.e., origin of interim leader; insider vs. outsider) was only controlled for. Insider interim leaders are perceived to be stronger interim leadership candidates due to close connections with relevant stakeholders and higher organisational knowledge required in short-term interim appointments (Browning & McNamee, 2012; Liang et al., 2012). However, a distinction in interim leader origin preference occurs when you consider the type of precarity associated with the interim leadership appointment. External interim leaders are more positively viewed by stakeholders following integrity failures whereas internal interim leaders are more positively viewed following competency failures (Connelly et al., 2016; Zhang et al.,

2025). In the present research, both interim candidates were positioned as outsider candidates to control for this effect. Future research should explore how the origin of the interim leader interacts with interim leadership role precarity in interim leadership appointment preferences.

Another promising area of research relates to whether the precarity associated with an interim role impacts future firm performance. The extant interim leadership literature suggests that interim leaders are more likely to move to permanent leadership following a strong interim performance (He & Zhu, 2020). Whereas, poor performance in interim leadership roles leads to lack of trust and career prospects (Liang et al., 2012). Zhao and colleagues (2024) suggested that transitional interim leaders have a more negative impact on firm performance compared to contender interim leaders. Future research should focus on the role of perceived interim leadership role precarity and its effect on firm performance.

### **7.8 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study addressed a critical gap by systematically integrating the literatures on interim leadership and the glass cliff phenomenon, providing the first experimental examination of whether interim leadership roles represent a novel operationalisation for the glass cliff, particularly for ethnic minority leaders. While the established operationalisation of the glass cliff has been through the permanent leadership lens, these findings indicate the increased preference for ethnic minority leaders when perceptions of interim leadership roles increase. These results not only extend the theoretical operationalisation of the glass cliff framework beyond permanent appointments but also underscore the critical interplay between role precarity and social identity in leadership appointment contexts. Practically, this research highlights the

## The Glass Cliff and Ethnic Minority Leaders

importance for organisations to carefully consider how interim leadership roles are framed, as this can implicitly contribute to the disproportionate appointment of ethnic minority leaders into precarious positions, potentially diminishing their leadership legitimacy and impeding their career trajectory. Ultimately, this chapter offers crucial insights for fostering more equitable and effective leadership appointment practices and provides avenues for new research on who is appointed as interim leaders.

## Chapter 8: General Discussion

The present research investigated the potential preference for ethnic minority leadership appointments to precarious leadership roles and the boundary conditions likely to moderate this effect. In examining the precarious leadership category and ethnic minority leadership, this thesis sought to advance knowledge beyond the challenge of underrepresentation and the traditional focus on role access. Instead, it examined the quality of roles that ethnic minority leaders are appointed to, thereby helping to illuminate the antecedents of the increased scrutiny and lack of career progression often faced by ethnic minority leaders. In particular, this thesis, which consists of a set of five studies, was designed to provide insights into the broader ethnic minority glass cliff construct by exploring three main research questions that addressed underexplored or novel boundary conditions: (1) whether the glass cliff is a function of predecessor-level performance rather than fixed, organisation-level performance for ethnic minority leaders; (2) to what extent does organisational ranking moderate the glass cliff effect for ethnic minority leaders; and (3) to what extent does interim leadership represent a novel boundary condition for the glass cliff. Drawing on leadership categorisation (Lord et al., 1984; Lord et al., 2020) and signalling theory (Spence, 1973), this research established the theoretical rationale for examining the social psychological phenomenon of the glass cliff (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Ryan et al., 2016). Methodologically, this thesis employed a multimethod quantitative approach, utilising both archival and experimental data to test the specific boundary conditions of organisational ranking and interim leadership.

In Chapters 2 and 3, the theoretical background and the identified gaps in the literature were introduced to form the hypotheses tested in the empirical chapters (Chapters 5 through 7). Chapter 2, which reviewed LCT, demonstrated that the persistence and prominence of the White leadership prototype may be susceptible to change as leadership contexts (e.g., precarious leadership) change through ad-hoc or goal-based categorisation (Barsalou, 1983). While the White leadership prototype has been explored in assessing leadership fit perception and subsequent appointment outcomes, few studies have explored how the context of organisational precarity shifts or expands the associated leadership prototype to ethnic minority leaders (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Obenauer & Langer, 2019). Furthermore, Chapter 2 presented an underexplored mechanism that may account for this shift in the leadership prototype for the precarious leadership category: transference (Preston & Carton, 2024; Ritter & Lord, 2007). However, this mechanism requires further evidence in the glass cliff context.

Chapter 3 introduced the phenomenon in which a preference for atypical leaders in precarious leadership roles occurs: the glass cliff. This chapter reviewed the emerging, but still limited, evidence for a potential preference for ethnic minority leaders in precarious leadership roles. It also highlighted a lack of understanding of the underlying mechanisms for this effect. While evidence of the ethnic minority glass cliff has emerged, mixed findings have limited the exploration of boundary conditions related to the effect (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Despite mixed or disconfirming evidence casting doubt on the existence of the effect, the high contextual specificity inherent to the glass cliff suggests that it warrants further exploration of its boundary conditions rather than its dismissal (Ryan et al., 2016). Following this perspective, the chapter

introduced two novel, yet critical, boundary conditions: organisational ranking and interim leadership. While these concepts have been explored from a signalling perspective in other contexts, their role has not previously been explored in the context of the glass cliff. These conditions provided new insight (e.g., interim leadership) or novel perspective on existing constructs (e.g., organisational ranking to the signalling motivation). The review presented in Chapters 2 and 3 established the foundation for this research, which provides novel theoretical and empirical contributions. These findings also offer practical insights into the mechanisms that underlie a preference for ethnic minority leaders in precarious leadership roles. The key contributions of the present research are summarised in Table 8.1 below, with a more detailed discussion of these contributions provided in the following sections.

**Table 8.1**

*Overview of the Research Contributions*

| Study  | Chapter | Theoretical  | Methodological  | Empirical  |
|--|---------|--|---|--|
| Study 1: The Glass Cliff, Predecessor Failure, and the Moderating Role of Organisational Ranking | 5       | Refines the leadership transference (Ritter & Lord, 2007) and categorisation (Lord et al., 1984, 2020) literature by demonstrating that the glass cliff phenomenon is more reactive to a predecessor's subjective, individual performance than to fixed, organisation-level outcomes<br><br>Introduces organisational ranking as a novel moderator of the glass cliff. | Used endogeneity-reducing analytical tools in propensity score matching and instrumental variable analysis to account for endogeneity bias common in glass cliff archival studies (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Li et al., 2024) | Provides concrete empirical evidence that the glass cliff is a phenomenon reactive to a predecessor's individual performance rather than to fixed, organisational-level outcomes.<br><br>Offered new evidence on organisational ranking moderation of the glass cliff<br><br>Archival findings in Chapter 5 provided partial evidence to suggest that lower organisational ranking may incentivise organisations to pursue shifts away from leader prototypicality (Kharouf et al., 2020). |
| Studies 2 & 3: Glass Cliff and   | 6       | Introduces the novel construct of organisational ranking in  | Novel framework for the experimental manipulation of  | Provided an initial causal examination of  |

**Table 8.1**

|   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| Organisational Moderation Experiments                 | the experimental context to add greater depth to the signalling motivation hypothesis that include factors beyond visibility, such as a organisation's size (Li et al., 2024) and familiarity (Kharouf et al., 2020)  | multi-dimensional boundary conditions, organisational ranking, within vignettes, allowing for a causal test of the role of visibility, size, and familiarity in the glass cliff effect (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014).   | organisational ranking as a moderator of the glass cliff effect. Although the moderation was not replicated, the studies established the empirical difficulty in translating a complex, real-world archival boundary condition into a manipulable, predictable experimental factor.                  |
| Studies 4 & 5: Interim Leadership and the Glass Cliff | <p>7 Identifies interim leadership as a critical and previously unexplored boundary condition for the glass cliff (Morgenroth et al., 2020).</p> <p>It argues that the effect is amplified in contexts of high perceived precarity (Adler &amp; Adler, 2004; Knox et al., 2014).</p> <p>By exploring an interim leadership typology, this chapter provides a nuanced theoretical extension to the glass cliff by showing that its</p> | <p>Application of an experimental vignette methodology to the interim leadership literature, where it has not been typically used (Connelly et al., 2016; Fisher et al., 2024)</p> <p>Integration of scales from the precarious work literature (Creed et al., 2020; Hellgren et al., 1999; O'Neill &amp; Sevastos, 2013; Vander Elst et al., 2013) to examine the associated precarity of interim leadership role types.</p> | Provides empirical support that perceived precarity is a critical driver of the glass cliff. Research provides preliminary partial evidence in favor of the idea that as participants' perception of a role's precarity increases, so does the likelihood of selecting an ethnic minority candidate. |

**Table 8.1**

mechanisms vary based on the framing and perceived precarity of the role itself (Mooney et al., 2012).

Integration of the precarious work literature (Creed et al., 2020; Hellgren et al., 1999; O'Neill & Sevastos, 2013; Vander Elst et al., 2013) to explore how variations in subjective perceptions of precarity increase the preference for ethnic minority leaders.

## 8.1 Overview of Research Studies

Following the theoretical (Chapters 2 & 3) and methodological (Chapter 4) overviews of the present research, Chapter 5 presented a non-experimental archival study using a matched sample of professional football leaders. The research examined the role of predecessor performance (derived from LCT and transference literature) and fixed, organisation-level performance in increasing the preference for ethnic minority leaders for precarious leadership roles. Building on signalling theory (Spence, 1973), the chapter also investigated how the contextual factor of organisational ranking might moderate this preference. I hypothesised that both poor fixed, organisation-level performance and poor predecessor performance would lead to the preference for ethnic minority leaders, with the effect being more prevalent when organisational ranking is lower. The study used propensity score matching and instrumental variable analysis to mitigate endogeneity challenges. (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Li et al., 2024; Reinwald et al., 2022).

Results showed that ethnic minority leaders were more likely to be appointed following poor predecessor performance, in line with the glass cliff hypothesis. However, the same effect was not identified when using fixed, organisation-level poor performance. Furthermore, the results directionally demonstrated the organisational ranking moderation of the glass cliff effect. Specifically, the effect of leadership candidate ethnicity on appointment to precarious leadership roles was more pronounced in lower ranked organisations than in higher ranked ones (IV estimate,  $p = .032$ ), although the OLS estimate using robust standard errors failed to reach traditional levels of significance ( $p = .077$ ). Simple slopes analysis assessing the organisational ranking moderation demonstrated a significant glass cliff effect for lower-ranked organisations

but not higher-ranked ones. Thus, the results presented in this chapter advance knowledge of the precarious leadership category with predecessor (compared to fixed, organisation-level) performance emerging as a central attribute in expanding leadership preferences to ethnic minority leaders. In addition, the results suggested that an organisation's ranking, particularly lower ranking, moderates the glass cliff effect adding more depth to the signalling motivation in considering contextual factors such as organisation size, visibility, and familiarity (Aguar-Noury & Garcia-del-Barrio, 2022; Kharouf et al., 2020; Saridakis et al., 2021).

In Chapter 6, two experimental studies (Studies 2 and 3) were conducted to build on the findings from Chapter 5. Using an experimental design, these studies allowed for a causal examination of the ethnic minority glass cliff and the moderating role of organisational ranking. As the archival research design did not allow for a direct test of the signalling hypothesis, the experimental design in Study 3 included a moderated mediation hypothesis (PROCESS Model 15; Hayes, 2017). This hypothesis stated that the selection of an ethnic minority candidate would be mediated by the perception of the organisation's desire to signal change, with this mechanism being moderated by lower organisational ranking.

Contrary to expectations, the results across both studies could not replicate the ethnic minority glass cliff results from Study 1 (see Chapter 5) and found that leadership candidate ethnicity did not significantly predict organisation selection. Furthermore, the organisational ranking moderation results failed to replicate as well. In light of the hypothesised results, evidence from exploratory findings from Study 2 was used to formalise the mediation moderation hypothesis explored in Study 3. Although the overall effect between leadership candidate ethnicity and precarious leadership

appointments was not found, Study 2 did identify that ethnic minority candidates were more likely to be selected for poorly performing (compared to strongly performing) organisations. In line with the signalling hypothesis, signalling change through leadership appointments mediated the relationship between leadership candidate ethnicity and organisation selection in Study 2. Regarding Study 3, all but one of the formalised moderated mediation model pathways failed to reach significance. The only significant pathway in the model was that a leadership candidate's perceived ability to signal change predicted precarious leadership selection. This finding provides partial support for signalling theory (Spence, 1973) in precarious leadership contexts. It demonstrated that while leadership candidate ethnicity was not significant, participants placed value on signals of change, particularly in contexts of poor organisational performance.

In Chapter 7, two experimental studies (Studies 4 and 5) were conducted to examine interim leadership roles, representing the first exploration of this role type as both a critical boundary condition and a novel theoretical extension of the glass cliff. Drawing on social psychology (i.e., glass cliff) and management (i.e., interim leadership) literature, I predicted that in Study 4, ethnic minority leadership candidates would be more likely to be selected for interim, as opposed to permanent, leadership positions. Building on findings from Study 4 and the precarious work literature (Adler & Adler, 2004), Study 5 hypothesised a gradual pattern in appointment preference, such that ethnic minority candidates would be more likely to be appointed as the perceived precariousness of the interim role type increased (e.g., interim role high precariousness, ambiguous in precariousness, and low precariousness).

Results from Study 4 did not show a significant difference between the selection of the ethnic minority candidate for interim leadership roles compared to permanent leadership roles. However, exploratory findings integrating research from the precarious work literature (Adler & Adler, 2004; Knox et al., 2014) did provide support in line with the glass cliff phenomenon. I found that as the participants' perception of leadership role precarity increased in the interim leadership condition, the likelihood of selecting the ethnic minority candidate significantly increased. This effect did not hold in the permanent leadership role condition. The results from Study 5 were mixed in relation to the proposed hypotheses. While the predicted gradual effect for interim leadership precarity did not reach statistical significance, the direction of the effect was in the predicted gradation. However, Study 5 did identify, through within-condition analysis, that the selection of the ethnic minority candidate was statistically significant against chance in the interim leadership role high in precarity condition. This effect against chance was not significant in the other two interim role conditions. Although not predicted in Study 5, findings from exploratory analysis showed (similar to findings for Study 4) that as the participants' perception of role precarity increased across all interim role type conditions, the likelihood of appointing an ethnic minority candidate also increased. The findings from this chapter identified interim leadership as a critical boundary condition for the glass cliff and the precarious leadership category. They also highlighted how assessments of perceived role precarity are relevant to this effect.

### **8.2 Discussion of Findings**

This section discusses the findings from my five empirical studies and provides important insight into the role of the precarious leadership category and an increased

preference for ethnic minority leaders. Where results did not support the proposed hypotheses, theoretical explanations are explored.

### ***8.2.1 The Glass Cliff for Ethnic Minority Leaders***

In Chapters 5 and 6 (Studies 1 through 3), I examined whether ethnic minority leaders would be more likely than their White counterparts to be appointed to precarious leadership roles (Hypothesis 1). LCT suggests that while ethnic minority leaders do not conform to the typical leadership prototype, certain organisational contexts (e.g., precarious leadership) can increase the likelihood of ethnic minority leadership appointments (Lord et al., 1984; Petsko & Rosette, 2023; Rosette et al., 2008). Consistent with the extant glass cliff literature (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2016), the present research found mixed evidence regarding this hypothesis, with the effect appearing in some contexts (e.g., Chapter 5, predecessor performance) but not others (e.g., Chapter 5, fixed organisation-level performance and Chapter 6, fixed organisation-level performance). The following section will explore several explanations for these findings.

One explanation for the mixed findings both across Chapters 5 and 6 and within Chapter 5 relates to the nature of organisational performance and how precarity is assessed. The glass cliff is conceptualised as a perception-based phenomenon, more likely to occur when precarious role contexts are subjectively evaluated (Haslam et al., 2010). Within the present research, precarious leadership roles were operationalised in varying ways: predecessor-level performance (Chapter 5), fixed, organisation-level performance (Chapters 5 and 6), and interim leadership (Chapter 7). The results suggest that the glass cliff was most likely to be identified when the leadership appointment was based on a perceptual (e.g., predecessor perceptions) or inferential judgment of

precarity (e.g., interim roles perceived as precarious), rather than fixed, organization-level precarity. This occurred when using predecessor performance as the measure of precarity in the archival study, Study 1 (Chapter 5). Research suggests that the narrative framings related to individuals (e.g., predecessor) can bias decision-making, compared to narratives framed around third-parties (e.g., organisations) (Winterbottom et al., 2008). In contrast, when leadership role precarity was based on more objective indicators of fixed, organisation-level performance, as found in Hypothesis 1a, the effect was attenuated. Although the glass cliff has been identified using fixed, organisation-level measures (e.g., Tobin's Q, ROA), these factors do not fully account for the interpersonal bias that may influence leadership appointment decisions (Angelovski et al., 2016).

This is further evidenced by findings from Study 1 using archival data (Chapter 5), which suggested that the glass cliff is a phenomenon responsive to the predecessor's performance as opposed to fixed, organisational-level outcomes. This finding supported the proposition that ethnic minority leaders would be more likely to be appointed following poor predecessor-level performance (Hypothesis 1b). Within the leadership categorisation literature, leader transference suggests that evaluators activate mental representations of previous leaders when assessing potential successors (Ritter & Lord, 2007). While leader transference was originally proposed to assess the positive link between predecessor-successor similarity, findings from Study 1 offer an alternative perspective. Transference may impact leadership succession events leading to a preference for atypical leaders as a strategic reaction to predecessor failure. This aligns with recent work proposing a racial transference mechanism, which suggests that ethnic (dis)similarity for leadership predecessors and successors is preferred when

organisations perform (poorly) strongly (Preston & Carton, 2024). Thus, preferences for ethnic minority leaders in glass cliff contexts may derive less from a perceived alignment between ethnic minority leaders and precarious leadership roles, and more from a strategic distancing from the failed predecessor.

The transference mechanism underlying these preferences also resonates with the literature on role imprinting (Burton & Beckman, 2007; Gilmore & Ronchi, 1995; Higgins, 2005) and role residual effects (Cooper & Cardon, 2018). These perspectives suggest that predecessor leaders leave legacy associations that impact organisational decision-making long after their departure (Burton & Beckman, 2007). For example, research has shown that a negative predecessor departure reduces team performance, trust, communication of tasks, motivation to work, and increases turnover intention under a successor leader (Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007). Role imprinting can also affect successor task behaviour once in leadership roles as well (Ingersoll et al., 2023; Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013; Schoar & Zuo, 2011). Leaders appointed during challenging organisational conditions (e.g., during recession) have been found to be more conservative in their risk tolerance and resource allocation (Schoar & Zuo, 2011). However, atypical leaders (e.g., women leaders) have been found to take more financial risk derived from a desire to overcome group stereotypes (Ingersoll et al., 2023). The present research suggests that ethnic minority leaders may contend with a similar burden. The negative “shadow” left by a poorly performing predecessor may damage the likelihood of their future success by implicitly impacting their leadership decisions within the role, regardless of their capability or potential. An open question for future research concerns the durability of such predecessor legacies: how long do these

shadows persist and to what extent do they shape leadership appointments beyond the immediate successor?

Beyond durability, the findings from Chapter 7 suggest that role imprinting and transference are not simple, straightforward effects. Instead, these mechanisms may vary based on the level of perceived precarity associated with the leadership role. As a leadership role's precarity increases, the necessity to deviate from the predecessor should also increase. However, the strength of the precarity itself is imprinted on the organisation to the same degree as the predecessor's negative legacy. This creates a double bind for the successor, likely an ethnic minority leader, who must try to lead the organisation out of precarity while contending with negative associations from the predecessor firmly imprinted on the team around them. This would be a challenge within the permanent leadership context, but one that would be amplified in the interim leadership context and the limited tenure to prove oneself as a capable successor.

### ***8.2.2 Boundary Conditions for the Ethnic Minority Glass Cliff***

The present research also investigated the potential moderating and boundary effects of the glass cliff for ethnic minority leaders. Accordingly, I applied leadership categorisation (Lord et al., 1984) and signalling theory (Spence, 1973) to develop and examine the boundary conditions and organisational incentives that may increase the preference for ethnic minority leaders in precarious leadership roles. The two novel constructs, organisational ranking and interim leadership, align with and extend the signalling motivation hypothesis previously evidenced in the glass cliff literature. Research has shown that visibility affects signaling motivation and the likelihood of the glass cliff (Kulich et al., 2015; Reinwald et al., 2022; Takizawa et al., 2024). Building on this, the conceptualisation of organisational ranking as a composite of size, visibility,

and familiarity allows us to add greater complexity to these prior findings. Similarly, interim leadership has been demonstrated to serve a strategic signalling purpose, particularly following organisational failures (Connelly et al., 2016). The results and their implications are discussed in turn.

This research introduced organisational ranking as a composite factor comprising organisation size, visibility, and familiarity (see Chapter 3). In Studies 1 and 3, I examined whether the glass cliff would be more likely for ethnic minority leaders in contexts in which organisational ranking was lower (Hypothesis 2). The findings suggest a nuanced relationship between organisational ranking and the glass cliff: in the archival study, lower ranked organisations were more likely to prefer ethnic minority leaders in precarious leadership roles, although this could not be confirmed experimentally. These results align with, and add complexity to prior research, which has reported mixed evidence on dimensions like organisational size and its effect on leadership appointments (Li et al., 2024; Saridakis et al., 2021). For instance, Saridakis et al. (2021) found that larger firms were more likely to appoint female leaders in precarious situations. In contrast, Li et al. (2024) found a different dynamic, where smaller organisations were more likely to appoint a female leader when facing poor performance, suggesting that these organisations were more willing to take a chance on a "non-prototypical" leader. This research synthesises and extends these inconsistent results by conceptualising organisational ranking as a composite factor of size, visibility, and familiarity. Study 1 (see Chapter 5) provides evidence that aligns with the Li et al. (2024) finding, showing that smaller (and therefore likely less familiar and less visible) organisations were indeed more likely to prefer atypical leaders in precarious leadership roles. However, the lack of an experimental replication suggests that the

nuanced, real-world context of organisational ranking, which Study 1 captured, may be difficult to replicate in a controlled experimental setting (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014).

This highlights that the complex interplay of organisational ranking and organisational incentives, while theoretically sound, is highly sensitive to methodological approaches and contextual factors. Despite clearly articulating the organisational ranking conditions in the experimental materials (Studies 2 and 3 in Chapter 6), replicating this construct in a realistic and immersive way may require alternative methods, such as video or virtual reality vignettes as opposed to text (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Wason et al., 2002).

Studies 4 and 5 (see Chapter 7) offered a novel theoretical extension of the glass cliff phenomenon as a critical boundary condition, while also providing the first empirical operationalisation of the glass cliff in the interim leadership context. In Study 4, I examined whether ethnic minority leadership candidates would be more likely than their White counterparts to be selected for interim, compared to permanent, leadership roles (Hypothesis 5). This study was designed to test the implicit association of interim leadership as a precarious leadership position based on two findings from the interim leadership literature: (1) interim leadership roles are non-permanent and often contain unclear delegation of authority (London, 2020; Woods et al., 2020); and (2) interim leadership roles often follow on from prior organisational failures (Ballinger & Marcel, 2009; Mooney et al., 2012). This dual precarity inherent to interim leadership makes it a critical, yet underexplored boundary condition for the glass cliff. While the results did not identify a clear preference for appointing ethnic minority leaders to interim leadership roles, the findings strongly support the subjective assessment approach to precarious work in the organisational psychology literature (Adler & Adler, 2004; Knox et al., 2014). While the interim leadership literature categorises interim leadership as

likely to follow organisational failure (Fischer et al., 2024; Mooney et al., 2016; Woods et al., 2020), the findings from Study 4 suggest that perceptions of precarity differ in assessing interim and permanent leadership roles such that a preference for ethnic minority leaders only emerged when interim leadership roles were perceived as high in precarity.

Study 5 extended this analysis by examining how different types of interim leadership roles, as conceptualised by Mooney and colleagues (2012), might shape preferences for ethnic minority leaders. I examined whether an ethnic minority candidate (as opposed to a White candidate) would be more likely to be selected for an interim leadership role high in precarity (e.g., no consideration for the permanent role and has no impact on strategic planning and long term decisions) than interim leadership roles low in precarity (e.g., strong consideration for the permanent role and has impact on strategic planning and long term decisions), and interim roles ambiguous in precarity (e.g., consideration for the permanent role and impact on strategic planning and long term decisions is unspecified) would be situated in-between (Hypothesis 6). The predicted gradual pattern of preference for ethnic minority leaders in interim leadership roles was not fully supported. However, a significant preference was found for ethnic minority leaders in the high-precarity condition, where their selection rate was above chance. This finding supports the argument from categorisation theory that category flexibility reflects task-dependent recruitment of knowledge structures (Barsalou, 1983; Dieciuc & Folstein, 2018). In other words, decision-makers appear to adjust their leadership prototypes in line with perceptions of role risk and precarity, increasing preference for ethnic minority leaders when roles are more precarious. These findings suggest that subjective perceptions of leadership role precarity, rather than

defined role features alone, are central to understanding how the glass cliff operates in the interim leadership context. Future research should further examine this distinction and explore how individualised precarity assessments influence leadership appointment decisions.

### 8.3 Research Contributions

The present research, consisting of five empirical studies, contributes to scholarly knowledge in several key ways.

First, this dissertation makes several key *theoretical contributions*. I advance the understanding of ethnic minority leader preferences by integrating LCT (Lord et al., 1984) with the glass cliff phenomenon. The findings across studies suggest that the precarious leadership category contains a strategic preference for ethnicity divergence, where a White predecessor would lead to an ethnic minority successor. Specifically, ad-hoc categorisation (Barsalou, 1983) processes explain how the White leadership prototype shifts to a preference for ethnic minority leaders in the context of precarious leadership based on need, where their appointment serves as a strategic deviation to the White leader prototype.

Applying signalling theory (Spence, 1973) to ad-hoc categorisation further addresses a critical topic related to the underlying signalling mechanism associated with precarious leadership (Kulich et al., 2015; Takizawa et al., 2024). This thesis proposed a novel construct, that is, organisational ranking, to add greater depth to the signalling literature. This research extends the knowledge of signalling beyond visibility to include critical factors like organisational size and familiarity, which incentivise the motivation for the glass cliff. As identified in Chapter 6 (Study 3), an organisation's size (Li et al., 2024) and levels of stakeholder familiarity (Kharouf et al., 2020) can

change the incentive structures for organisations to benefit from the signals created by ethnic minority leadership appointments in precarious organisational contexts.

Additionally, my integration of scales from the precarious work literature (Creed et al., 2020; Hellgren et al., 1999; O'Neill & Sevastos, 2013; Vander Elst et al., 2013) into the glass cliff extends knowledge about how variations in subjective perceptions of precarity increase the preference for ethnic minority leaders. The extant literature has portrayed crisis type (e.g., Takizawa et al., 2024) and visibility (e.g., Reinwald et al., 2022) as impacting the ethnic minority glass cliff. Integrating how evaluators perceive the precarity of leadership roles adds important nuance to the glass cliff phenomenon. It shows that the glass cliff can reflect both the objective and subjective realities of the organisation (Haslam et al., 2010). More importantly, it is the evaluator's perception of the role's precarity that directly impacts leadership appointment outcomes.

Finally, to the best of my knowledge, this research presents the first examination of interim leadership as a theoretical extension of the glass cliff phenomenon. Following leadership categorisation and ad-hoc categorisation associations, this research advances the theoretical understanding of how perceived leadership role precarity and ethnicity affect preferences for interim leadership roles. This research, by applying Mooney and colleagues (2012) interim leadership typology (see Chapter 7, Study 5), extends the theoretical boundaries of the glass cliff beyond a simple interim versus permanent distinction. This approach allowed for a more nuanced conceptualisation of precarity and offers a novel lens to explore how different types of interim roles can serve as a critical boundary condition for the glass cliff effect.

Second, the present research makes several *methodological contributions*. Despite variations in the strength of glass cliff effects across study designs, the present

findings also contribute to debate on the methodological rigour in glass cliff research. Prior critiques (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Li et al., 2024; Reinwald et al., 2022) have argued that archival studies of the glass cliff often fail to identify the underlying causal mechanisms and may suffer from endogeneity concerns. For instance, the glass cliff effect is more difficult to detect when accounting for endogeneity within analytical strategy (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Li et al., 2024). However, the present research addressed endogeneity concerns (see Chapter 5, Study 1) by employing instrumental variable analysis and propensity score matching procedures to isolate causal mechanisms. This approach strengthened the evidence for the glass cliff amongst ethnic minority leaders. While prior studies have used different methods (e.g., regression discontinuity analysis, instrumental variable analysis) to identify the glass cliff for women leaders, the present research appears to be the first to apply endogeneity-reducing techniques in the context of ethnic minority leadership.

This research also provides a significant methodological contribution by applying an experimental vignette methodology to the interim leadership literature, where it has not been typically used (Connelly et al., 2016; Fisher et al., 2024). Prior research has largely relied on archival data, which limits the ability to explore underlying social-psychological mechanisms. By designing a series of vignettes in Chapter 7, I was able to manipulate key variables such as role precariousness and leadership candidate ethnicity in a controlled setting. This approach provides a new and validated way to investigate how subjective perceptions of interim leadership roles and their associated contexts influence leadership preferences, thereby expanding the methodological toolkit available to scholars in this field.

Third, the present research makes several important *empirical contributions* by providing concrete evidence that addresses inconsistent findings in the glass cliff literature. The present research introduced and tested novel boundary conditions, offering new insights into the factors that produce the glass cliff effect for ethnic minority leaders. First, I provided new evidence that a preference for ethnic minority leaders is a function of predecessor-level poor performance rather than fixed, organisation-level poor performance. The variation in metrics used to classify leadership role precariousness is one factor contributing to the fragmented knowledge on this topic (Morgenroth et al., 2020). The glass cliff is a perception-based phenomenon, and results suggest that when the subjective or perception-driven assessment of leadership role precariousness was most salient, the glass cliff effect was more likely to be identified. This was evident in the use of predecessor performance, a metric that, due to its strong narrative and interpretative association, can bias decision-making more than objective, third-party organisational metrics (Winterbottom et al., 2008). This is a crucial distinction and a significant empirical finding, as it challenges the traditional measurement approach in the literature and suggests a different causal, interpersonal mechanism is at play.

Based on findings from the present research, I suggest that while measurement of leadership role precariousness is critical in evidencing the glass cliff, the subjective interpretation of perceived precariousness also appears to determine ethnic minority leadership preferences. In line with the precarious work literature (e.g., Adler & Adler, 2004; Creed et al., 2020; Hellgren et al., 1999; Knox et al., 2014), role quality contains both subjective and objective associations. The subjective and objective associations do not necessarily need to align due to the variability of individual characteristics and

preferences (e.g., security of tenure, willingness to perform required tasks; Knox et al., 2014). The experimental studies in Chapter 7 (Studies 4 and 5) provide empirical support for the idea that perceived precarity is a critical driver of the glass cliff. The present research demonstrated that as participants' perception of a role's precarity increases, so does the likelihood of selecting an ethnic minority candidate. This finding, observed in both studies, provides strong evidence for the significance in defining precarious leadership through a perceptual or interpretive lens rather than static assessments of precariousness.

Lastly, the introduction of a novel moderator of the glass cliff, organisational ranking, produced inconsistent yet potentially important findings. While the two experimental studies presented in Chapter 6 (Studies 2 and 3) did not fully replicate the archival findings in Chapter 5 (Study 1), initial results suggest that lower organisational ranking may incentivise organisations to pursue shifts away from leader prototypicality (Kharouf et al., 2020). Smaller organisations are also more prone to rely on motivational indicators to make hiring decisions (Barber et al., 1999) as outlined in ad-hoc categorisation. In contrast, higher-ranked, larger firms may have an equal but opposite disincentive from pursuing this same strategy. As a result of higher institutional pressures and increased outward visibility, larger organisations tend to be more risk-averse (Barber et al., 1999), leading to more prototypical selection patterns (e.g., appointing the prototypical White leader). This suggests a complex interplay between organisational ranking, signalling, and leadership preference that warrants further exploration.

#### **8.4 Practical Implications**

The findings from the present research have a number of implications for addressing ethnic minority leadership underrepresentation. The first key finding concerns the influence of predecessor-level information dictating ethnicity-based preferences for successor leaders. The second key finding suggests that specific organisational and role characteristics, such as low organisational ranking or interim leadership requirements, also affect preference for ethnic minority leaders in precarious leadership roles. Together, these results have important implications for organisations seeking to attract, develop, and retain leadership talent.

Regarding the first key finding, even those ethnic minority leaders who rise above the well-established glass ceiling (Adamovic & Leibbrandt, 2023) continue to face barriers to career advancement. The present findings suggest that ethnic minority leaders are being assessed based on the precarious contexts to which they are appointed, rather than the knowledge, skills, and abilities they possess (Gündemir et al., 2019). Given this, organisations must be wary of not only appointing leaders based solely on a reaction to the predecessor's performance (Preston & Carton, 2024), but also of how organisational precarity may unfairly shape performance perceptions and outcomes for ethnic minority leaders once they are in these roles (Burton & Beckman, 2007). A failure to mitigate these risks will likely increase leadership turnover, which research suggests leads to sustained poor organisational performance (Kim et al., 2020). To support ethnic minority leaders and mitigate these risks, organisations should prioritise building social capital (e.g., by providing extensive opportunities for industry and community group engagement). In doing so, organisations will allow ethnic minority leaders to build value for themselves and their organisations in the role (Ursel et al.,

2023). Because ethnic minority leaders already experience network disadvantages, role precariousness can further exacerbate challenges to their leadership credibility.

With the growing importance of interim leadership appointments (Fisher et al., 2024), organisations must also consider how the initial appointment decision can influence a leader's ability to be utilised effectively. From a performance perspective, interim leaders can serve as positive signals to stakeholders that turnaround is the organisations' top priority, particularly after failure (Connelly et al., 2016). However, the present finding suggests that this positive strategic signal may come at the detriment of ethnic minority interim leaders in precarious interim roles. This risk is increased when interim leaders are internal to the organisation. For example, a recent study by Ibar et al. (2025) found that when internal leaders are elevated to an interim leadership role, the change in required behaviour from a "non-leader" to a "leader" role can decrease perceptions of their leadership effectiveness. This suggests that the incongruity between their past role and their new responsibilities can harm their standing within the organisation. The challenges are different but no less significant for external interim leaders, who may lack the organisational social capital and familiarity with the internal culture required to successfully navigate such a precarious leadership context (Bae et al., 2020). The disproportionate appointment of ethnic minority interim leaders to precarious interim leadership roles may therefore harm their perceived effectiveness in the role, limit their ability to succeed in the role, and increase the likelihood of turnover for those individuals (Obenauer & Langer, 2019). Organisations must acknowledge the behavioural implications of interim leadership appointments and consider the contexts in which they appoint such leaders.

### **8.5 Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This section outlines the limitations found within the present research and proposes avenues for future study. First, while this research provides strong evidence that ethnic minority leaders are more likely to be appointed to precarious roles, an outcome consistent with the glass cliff, it was limited in its ability to directly capture the underlying category associations (e.g., perceptions of category fit) or psychological mechanisms driving these decisions. Instead, the present research inferred these associations from the appointment decisions themselves, which are the behavioural outcomes. While this is a standard approach in much of the glass cliff literature, future research could use direct measures, such as rating scales (Lord et al., 1984; Rosch & Mervis, 1975) or implicit association tests (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998), to provide more explicit evidence of these cognitive processes related to the glass cliff. Furthermore as leadership appointments continue to be made in precarious contexts, it is possible that the ad-hoc category of a "crisis leader" becomes a common category through repeated exposure to that category (Poitrenaud et al., 2005). Thus, the appointment of an ethnic minority leader to such a role, initially a one-off decision, may become a habitual cognitive pattern for decision-makers (Barsalou, 1983). Future research should therefore explore whether the experience of repeatedly making precarious leadership appointments embeds this temporary "ad-hoc" categorisation into a more stable "common" category, which would further entrench the glass cliff in organisational decision-making.

Second, the present study did not allow us to directly observe categorisation and transference measures, which may inform signalling explanations related to organisational ranking. While the findings suggest that comparatively lower ranked

organisations utilise atypical leaders during precarious periods, this does not provide direct evidence of the signalling mechanism. However, the organisational ranking results reported in Chapter 5, Study 1 align with Ihmel and colleagues' (2023) results suggesting that the glass cliff was more prevalent when media visibility was low.

Limited evidence suggests that organisation size and visibility are positively correlated, making the signalling association with organisation ranking plausible (Jonkman et al., 2019) and warranting further research.

Third, the finding that interim leadership appointments are a critical boundary condition of the glass cliff opens a predominantly unexplored area for future research. While the focus of the present research centered on the role of precariousness associated with interim leadership and ethnic minority leaders, scholars can build on this work by exploring how specific aspects of these appointments, such as the motivations to pursue interim roles, the length of an interim leader's tenure, and perceptions of their future leadership potential, may differ for ethnic minority leaders (Fisher et al., 2024). For example, a mixed-methods research design could be used to investigate whether the length of interim tenure or the experience of success or failure in that role affects leadership perceptions and future opportunities for White and ethnic minority leaders. Investigating questions like these would provide vital insight into a common but under-researched form of leadership (Langan & Deuschel, 2025). Furthermore, this additional research into the specific context of interim leadership could help to disentangle the underlying mechanisms of the glass cliff in this unique setting.

Fourth, although outside the immediate scope of this thesis, the present research raised two additional contextual factors that merit future examination: future success

expectations and legacy impact of celebrity CEO predecessors. While most glass cliff research focuses on conditions leading up to leadership appointments, little is known about the performance expectations held by organisations within the context of leadership precarity (Cook & Glass, 2013b; Obenauer & Langer, 2019). Future research should explore whether organisations hold systematically different expectations in future performance between White and ethnic minority leaders in precarious leadership roles. This investigation could focus on metrics such as predicted tenures via contract lengths (Cook & Glass, 2013b), termination processes (Obenauer & Langer, 2019), and compensation structures. In addition, this research did not explicitly examine the influence of celebrity CEOs on successor appointments (Lovelace et al., 2018). Prior work suggests that succeeding celebrity CEOs increases the likelihood of leader turnover (Graffin et al., 2012). Future research should explore how long of a shadow a celebrity CEO casts on leadership appointment processes, particularly glass cliff appointments.

Lastly, the classification of ethnic minorities into one ethnic, racial, immigrant (ERI) group identity is common in the extant literature (Cook & Glass, 2013b; Hill et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2024; Takizawa et al., 2024). It is important to acknowledge that this research utilises a broad ethnicity categorisation, often operationalising ethnicity narrowly through visual cues (skin tone; Studies 1 through 5) or aggregated data (Study 1). However, research suggests that leadership outcomes differ by ethnic minority group likely due to between-group differences (Ursel et al., 2023). Specifically, within the glass cliff literature, some evidence points to the glass cliff being more prominent for Black and Middle Eastern leaders compared to South or East Asian leaders (Morgenroth et al., 2020). While the single ERI group identity

perspective has provided valuable insights in the present research, a more nuanced understanding of the glass cliff necessitates a broader consideration of the complex interplay of ethnicity-informed contextual factors. These factors can significantly influence the observed effect size, potentially leading to null or inconclusive findings in some studies.

### **8.6 Conclusion**

The overall objective of this research was twofold. First, this research examined whether ethnic minority leaders are more likely than White leaders to be appointed to precarious leadership positions, referred to as glass cliff roles, which arise, for example, in contexts of poor organisational performance, reputational crisis, or general organisational instability (Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Ryan et al., 2016). Second, this study examined potential novel boundary conditions of the glass cliff effect derived from the extant literature on signalling and interim leadership. Drawing on LCT (Lord et al., 1984; Lord et al., 2020), this research suggests that while ethnic minority leaders may not fit the general leadership prototype, certain organisational contexts, such as precarious leadership environments, can lead to a shift in prototype perception. This shift allows the appointment of an ethnic minority leader to serve as a powerful signal of change to stakeholders, thus enhancing their perceived leadership fit specifically for a precarious leadership role.

Across five studies, evidence emerged that ethnic minority leaders were preferred in glass cliff roles, particularly when role precariousity was framed in relation to predecessor (vs. fixed, organisation-level) performance. This finding aligns with recent evidence from Preston and Carton's (2024) racial transference phenomenon which would benefit from further research. Furthering the goal-based categorisation

perspective (Barsalou, 1983; Carton & Rosette, 2011), this research explored two novel constructs in the glass cliff literature: (1) that organisational ranking moderated the effect in that lower (vs. higher) ranked organisations were more likely to appoint ethnic minority leaders in precarious leadership roles; and (2) that interim leadership roles are a critical boundary condition for the glass cliff, particularly when taking into account how interim roles are framed and thus ultimately perceived in terms of precarity.

Evidence emerged to lend initial support to both the organisational ranking and interim leadership boundary condition propositions. Future research should further develop these operationalisations to strengthen general understanding of how organisational context shapes the glass cliff phenomenon for ethnic minority leaders.

Through these findings this study makes a number of contributions to the leadership and glass cliff literature. First, it offers evidence to deepen understanding of the glass cliff by introducing a critical new level of analysis: the predecessor-successor relationship. Second, this research extends the glass cliff framework beyond permanent leadership to include interim leadership roles, which are a critical boundary condition given their inherent instability and unique function in an organisation's leadership life cycle. Third, it indirectly advances the signalling hypothesis of the glass cliff (Kulich et al., 2015; Reinwald et al., 2022) by introducing organisational ranking as a moderator. Fourth, this research addresses the lacunae of research on ethnic minority leadership in precarious leadership appointments. While small glass cliff effects have been identified for female leaders (Morgenroth et al., 2020), relatively few studies have explored ethnic minority business leaders as the focal group for glass cliff appointments. The findings from this research adds to limited evidence on ethnic minority leaders and the glass cliff

and extends this work through novel contextual factors that disproportionately affect such individuals.

In conclusion, this research contributes to understanding one possible explanation for the underrepresentation of ethnic minority leaders: the conditions in which ethnic minority leadership appointments are most likely to occur. The present research found evidence to suggest that ethnic minority leaders were preferred in leadership roles high in precarity representing the glass cliff, particularly when precarity was associated with predecessor performance. Moreover, this glass effect was present in specific organisational contexts such as lowly ranked organisations and within organisations appointing interim leaders into highly precarious positions. Together, these findings provide new insights into the complexity of leadership appointment processes, particularly those ascribed as glass cliff contexts. This thesis has advanced knowledge of how leadership appointment conditions can pose inherent risks to the careers of ethnic minority leaders and identifies areas where organisations and scholars can work together to mitigate these inequities.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: DCU Ethics Approvals

#### *Appendix A.1: Chapter 6 - Study 2 Ethics Approval*

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University



**Mr Sean Dempsey**  
DCU Business School

28th March 2023

**REC Reference:** DCUREC/2023/073

**Proposal Title:** Study of Impressions of Potential Job Candidates in the Soccer Context Education

**Applicant(s):** Mr Sean Dempsey, Prof Janine Bosak, Prof Clara Kulich,

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your application to DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC). Further to notification review, DCU REC is pleased to issue approval for this research proposal.

DCU REC's consideration of all ethics applications is dependent upon the information supplied by the researcher. This information is expected to be truthful and accurate. Researchers are responsible for ensuring that their research is carried out in accordance with the information provided in their ethics application.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,



Taighde & Nuálaíocht Tacaíocht  
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath,  
Baile Átha Cliath, Éire

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Dublin City University,  
Dublin 9, Ireland

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Melrona Kirrane". The signature is written in a cursive style.

**Dr. Melrona Kirrane**  
Chairperson  
DCU Research Ethics Committee

*Note: Please retain this approval letter for future publication purposes (for research students, this includes incorporating the letter within their thesis appendices).*

*Appendix A.2: Chapter 7 Study 1 and 2 Ethics Approval*

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University



Sean Dempsey  
DCU Business School, Department of Work, Strategy, and

Psychology 4<sup>th</sup> September 2024

**REC Reference:** DCUREC/2024/157 (Notification Review)

**Proposal Title:** Study of Impressions of Potential Interim Leadership  
Candidates in the Soccer Context

**Applicant(s):** Sean Dempsey, Professor Janine Bosak

Dear Colleague(s),

Thank you for your application to DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC). Further to its review by the committee and resting on the assumption of information accuracy and completeness, DCU REC is pleased to issue ethical approval for this research project. Please include reference to this approval in all materials used to recruit research participants.

Researchers are responsible for ensuring that the research project to which this ethical approval refers is carried out as specifically described in the application form. Should modifications to the research project be required at a later stage, researchers must submit a research amendment application form to REC for approval, prior to the implementation of modifications.

Please note that it is the responsibility of the PI to ensure that any other DCU compliance requirements relevant to the research project, such as those related to data protection, insurance, health and safety, or legal issues, are fully met in advance of initiating the project.

As part of DCU REC's ongoing monitoring process, a research progress report may be required. DCU REC will request this report from the PI as appropriate.

DCU REC wishes you every success in your research.



## The Glass Cliff and Ethnic Minority Leaders

Yours sincerely,

Dr Melrona Kirrane  
Chairperson  
DCU Research Ethics Committee

*Note: Please retain this approval letter for future publication purposes. Research students should include this letter as a thesis appendix.*

**Taighde & Nuálaíocht Tacaíocht**  
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**Appendix B: Study Pre-Registration Forms**

***Appendix B.1: Chapter 6 - Study 2 Pre-Registration***

**The Glass Cliff, Ethnic Minority Leaders, and Organisational Ranking**

**Moderation (#197855)**

**Author(s)**

Sean Dempsey (Dublin City University Business School) -

sean.dempsey36@mail.dcu.ie Janine Bosak (Dublin City University Business School) -

janine.bosak@dcu.ie

Clara Kulich (University of Geneva) - [Clara.Kulich@unige.ch](mailto:Clara.Kulich@unige.ch)

Pre-registered on: 11/06/2024 02:14 AM (PT)

**1. Have any data been collected for this study already?**

No, no data have been collected for this study yet.

**2. What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?**

- Ethnic minority leadership candidates will be more likely to face a glass cliff (that is being selected for a leadership position in poorly (compared to strongly) performing organisations), a pattern not observed for White counterparts.
- The relationship between leadership candidate ethnicity and selection for glass cliff leadership roles is moderated by organisational ranking, such that ethnic minority leadership candidates are more likely to be selected for glass cliff leadership roles in lower-ranked organisations compared to higher-ranked organisations.

- The relationship between organisational performance and the selection of ethnic minority leadership candidates will be mediated by the organisation's desire to visibly signal change in terms of signalling an intent to alter leadership styles. In addition, this mediation effect will be moderated by organisational ranking, such that low-ranked, compared to high-ranked, organisations are more likely to select ethnic minority leadership candidates for the poorly (vs strongly) performing organisation as a signal of change to stakeholders.

**3. Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.**

Dependent variable: Organisation selection will be a binary selection between either the strong or poor performing organisation for the leadership candidate (coded -1 = strong performing, 1 = poor performing).

Mediator: Signalling change will be measured using a 6-item scale, with items assessing participants' intent to signal change through leadership selection.

Responses to these items will be averaged to create a continuous composite score (with higher scores indicating a stronger desire to signal change). A sample item includes "The choice of this candidate symbolises a visible change for staff". Each item is rated on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

**4. How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?**

Participants will be randomly assigned to an ethnic minority or a White leadership candidate condition (IV1) and a high or low ranking organisation condition (IV2): The experimental design is 2 leadership candidate ethnicity (White vs ethnic minority) x 2 (organisational ranking: high vs low) between-participants

**5. Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.**

To test our hypotheses, we will use the following analyses:

We will perform a binary logistic regression with organisational selection (strong vs. poor performing organisation) as the dependent variable (DV). The predictors are IV1 leadership candidate ethnicity (coded -1 = White, 1 = ethnic minority) and IV2 organisational ranking (coded -1 = high ranking, 1 = low ranking) as well as their interaction.

For Hypothesis 1 (Effect of Leader Candidate Ethnicity and Organisation Selection):

To test Hypothesis 1, we expect the effect of leadership candidate ethnicity (IV1) on organisational selection (strong vs poor performing organisation) to be significant, such that ethnic minority leadership candidates are more likely to be selected for poorly-performing organisations than strongly-performing ones.

For Hypothesis 2 (Moderation of the Glass Cliff by Organisational Ranking):

To test Hypothesis 2, we expect the interaction between leadership candidate ethnicity (IV1) and organisational ranking (IV2) to be significant, indicating that the likelihood of selecting ethnic minority leadership candidates for glass cliff

leadership roles is higher in lower-ranked organisations compared to higher-ranked ones.

For Hypothesis 3 (Moderated Mediation of Organisational Selection):

A moderated mediation analysis will be used to examine whether the desire to signal change (continuous mediator) mediates the relationship between leadership candidate ethnicity (IV1) and organisational selection (DV), and whether this mediation is moderated by organisational ranking (IV2). To test Hypothesis 3, we expect the mediation effect (the indirect effect of leadership candidate ethnicity on organisational selection via the desire to signal change) to be significant, and further moderated by organisational ranking, such that the indirect effect is stronger in lower-ranked organisations compared to higher-ranked ones.

**6. Describe exactly how outliers will be defined and handled, and your precise rule(s) for excluding observations.**

Any observations with missing critical information that is essential to the dependent or independent variables will be excluded from analysis. Participants who fail to comply with the experimental instructions (e.g., those who do not complete the task, engage in random clicking, or fail at least one of the attention checks) will also be excluded. We have included three attention check items in the experiment to measure participant attentiveness. Additionally, participants younger than 18 years old will be excluded.

- 7. How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.**

The extant glass cliff literature indicates that we are likely to observe a small effect size (OR = 1.44; Morgenroth et al., 2020). As such, an a priori power analysis for logistic regression using G\*Power (80% power and  $\alpha = .05$ ) dictates a minimum requirement of 200 participants. We aim to target more than 240 participants to account for missing or unusable data to ensure we reach suitable statistical power.

- 8. Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., secondary analyses, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)**

We intend to explore the relationship between organisational ranking and perceived firm size, visibility, and familiarity of the presented organisations.

While research suggests that these variables are associated with outcomes related to organisational ranking, these items have not been directly measured in an experimental setting. Participants will estimate each of the two organisations' (strong vs poor performing) firm size, visibility, and familiarity based on a visual display of the organisation's ranking comparative to competitors.

*Appendix B.2: Chapter 7 - Study 1 Pre-Registration*

**The Glass Cliff, Ethnic Minority Leaders, and the Interim Leadership Context (#210276)**

Author(s)

This pre-registration is currently anonymous to enable blind peer-review. It has 3 authors.

Pre-registered on: 2025/01/30 - 03:22 AM (PT)

**1. Have any data been collected for this study already?**

No, no data have been collected for this study yet.

**2. What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?**

Primary hypothesis:

Ethnic minority leadership candidates will be more likely to be selected for interim, compared to permanent, leadership positions; a pattern not observed for their White counterparts.

**3. Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.**

Dependent variable: Selected candidate's ethnicity will be a binary selection between White and ethnic minority leadership candidates (coded 0 = White, 1 = ethnic minority).

**4. How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?**

This study employs a 2 Leadership Role Type (interim vs permanent) between-subjects design where participants are randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (IV1). The DV is candidate choice (White or ethnic minority candidate) for the leadership position under consideration.

**5. Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.**

To test our hypothesis, we will use the following analysis:

We will perform a binary logistic regression with selected candidate's ethnicity (0 = White, 1 = ethnic minority) as the dependent variable (DV). The predictor is IV1 Leadership Role Type (coded 0 = permanent leadership role, 1 = interim leadership role).

Hypothesis 1 tests the effect of interim leader status on selected candidate's ethnicity: we expect the effect of Leadership Role Type (IV1) on the selected candidate's ethnicity (White vs ethnic minority) to be significant, such that ethnic minority leadership candidates are more likely to be selected for an interim leader role than a permanent leader role; a pattern not observed for their White counterparts.

**6. Describe exactly how outliers will be defined and handled, and your precise rule(s) for excluding observations.**

Any observations with missing critical information that is essential to the dependent or independent variables will be excluded from analysis. Participants who fail to comply with the experimental instructions (e.g., those who do not complete the task, engage in random clicking, or show evidence of inattentiveness) will also be excluded. We have included one attention check in the experiment to measure participant attentiveness. Additionally, participants younger than 18 years old will be excluded.

**7. How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.**

The extant glass cliff literature indicates that we are likely to observe a small effect size (OR = 1.44; Morgenroth et al., 2020). As such, an a priori power analysis for logistic regression using G\*Power (80% power and  $\alpha = .05$ ) dictates a sample size of 199 participants. Prior research has identified that larger effects have been found for atypical candidates (OR = 2.12; Takizawa et al., 2024).

To account for potential attrition or exclusion of participants, a sample size of 250 will be targeted which represents the ability to detect a medium effect size (OR = 1.48).

**8. Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., secondary analyses, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)**

Following competence-related failure, interim leaders are often perceived as

effective signals of change to external stakeholders (Connelly et al., 2016). In this study, we aim to test whether the effectiveness of interim leadership appointments as signals of change differs from permanent leaders based on the ethnicity of the selected candidate (White vs. ethnic minority). Specifically, we will explore how the relationship between the selected leader's ethnicity and the perception of leadership appointments as an effective signal of change varies across different Leadership Role Types, particularly in interim leadership contexts. Signalling change will be measured using a 6-item scale, with items assessing participants' intent to signal change through leadership selection. Responses to these items will be averaged to create a continuous composite score (with higher scores indicating a stronger desire to signal change). A sample item includes "The choice of this candidate symbolises a visible change for staff".

*Appendix B.3: Chapter 7 - Study 2 Pre-Registration*

**The Glass Cliff, Ethnic Minority Leaders, and Interim Leadership Role Type (#231834)**

Author(s)

This pre-registration is currently anonymous to enable blind peer-review. It has 3 authors.

Pre-registered on: 2025/06/04 - 03:41 AM (PT)

**1. Have any data been collected for this study already?**

No, no data have been collected for this study yet.

**2. What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?**

Hypothesis 1: An ethnic minority candidate (as opposed to a White candidate) will be more likely to be selected for an interim leadership role high in precarity (e.g., no consideration for the permanent role and has no impact on strategic planning and long term decisions) than interim leadership roles low in precarity (e.g., strong consideration for the permanent role and has impact on strategic planning and long term decisions), and interim roles ambiguous in precarity (e.g., consideration for the permanent role and impact on strategic planning and long term decisions is unspecified) will be situated in-between.

**3. Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.**

Dependent variable: Selected candidate's ethnicity will be a binary selection between a White and an ethnic minority leadership candidate (coded 0 = White, 1 = ethnic minority).

**4. How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?**

This study employs a 3 interim leadership role type (high precarity vs low precarity vs ambiguous precarity interim role types) between-subjects design where participants are randomly assigned to one of the three conditions (IV1).

Interim role high in precarity (seat-warmer): no consideration for the permanent role and has no impact on strategic planning and long term decisions.

Interim role low in precarity (contender): strong consideration for the permanent role and has impact on strategic planning and long term decisions.

Interim roles ambiguous in precarity (undefined): consideration for the permanent role and impact on strategic planning and long term decisions is unspecified

Participants will be randomly assigned to one of these three conditions. The dependent variable (DV) is candidate selection, operationalised as a binary

choice between a White and an ethnic minority leadership candidate for the same leadership role.

**5. Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.**

We will conduct a logistic regression analysis with selected candidate ethnicity (0 = White, 1 = ethnic minority) as the binary dependent variable. To assess the effect of interim leadership role type on candidate selection, we will apply a gradual contrast (C1) to represent the ordinal relationship between the three conditions:

Interim role high in precarity (seat-warmer) = +1

Interim roles ambiguous in precarity (undefined) = 0

Interim role low in precarity (contender) = -1

We expect that ethnic minority candidates will be more likely to be selected as role precarity increases across the three conditions. To confirm that this pattern follows a gradual trend, and not a non-gradual or U-shaped pattern, we will include a second, orthogonal contrast (residual contrast; C2) that captures any additional variance in role conditions not explained by the gradual trend.

Hypothesis 1 will be supported if the gradual contrast (C1) is significant and the residual contrast (C2) is not significant.

**6. Describe exactly how outliers will be defined and handled, and your precise rule(s) for excluding observations.**

Any observations with missing critical information that is essential to the dependent or independent variables will be excluded from analysis. Participants who fail to comply with the experimental instructions (e.g., those who do not complete the task, engage in random clicking, or show evidence of inattentiveness) will also be excluded. We have included one attention check in the experiment to measure participant attentiveness. Additionally, participants younger than 18 years old will be excluded.

**7. How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.**

Prior studies have reported a range of effect sizes in similar experimental designs. Takizawa et al. (2024) reported an  $OR = 1.64$  for increased selection of ethnic minority leaders in low-visibility crises. Morgenroth et al. (2020) report a meta-analytic average of  $OR = 1.44$  for glass cliff effects. Using this range, our power analysis targets a minimum of 250 participants to detect a moderate effect ( $OR = 1.44$ – $1.64$ ) with 80% power at  $\alpha = .05$ .

To account for potential attrition or exclusion of participants, a sample size of 276 (92 participants per condition) will be targeted which represents the ability to detect a medium effect size ( $OR = 1.55$ ).

**8. Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., secondary analyses, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)**

Following competence-related failure, interim leaders are often perceived as effective signals of change to external stakeholders (Connelly et al., 2016). In this study, we aim to test whether the effectiveness of interim leadership appointments as signals of change differs based on the ethnicity of the selected candidate (White vs. ethnic minority) and the interim leader role type (high precarity vs. ambiguous precarity vs. low precarity). Signalling change will be measured using a 6-item scale, with items assessing participants' intent to signal change through leadership selection. Responses to these items will be averaged to create a continuous composite score (with higher scores indicating a stronger desire to signal change). A sample item includes "The choice of this candidate symbolises a visible change for staff".

We will conduct exploratory analysis on whether participant's perceived role precarity will moderate the relationship between selected candidate ethnicity and interim leadership role type. Participant perceived precarity is to adapt items from validated precarious work scales. Items would be adapted from (Vander Elst et al., 2014; O'Neill & Sevastos, 2013; Hellgren et al., 1999; Creed et al., 2020) with sample items being "This leadership role offers little long-term security" and "Even with strong performance, the person in this role might not remain long-term".

## The Glass Cliff and Ethnic Minority Leaders

We will explore whether White candidates are more likely to be selected in interim roles low in precarity (contender), with selection decreasing as role precarity increases, an exploratory counterpart to Hypothesis 1.